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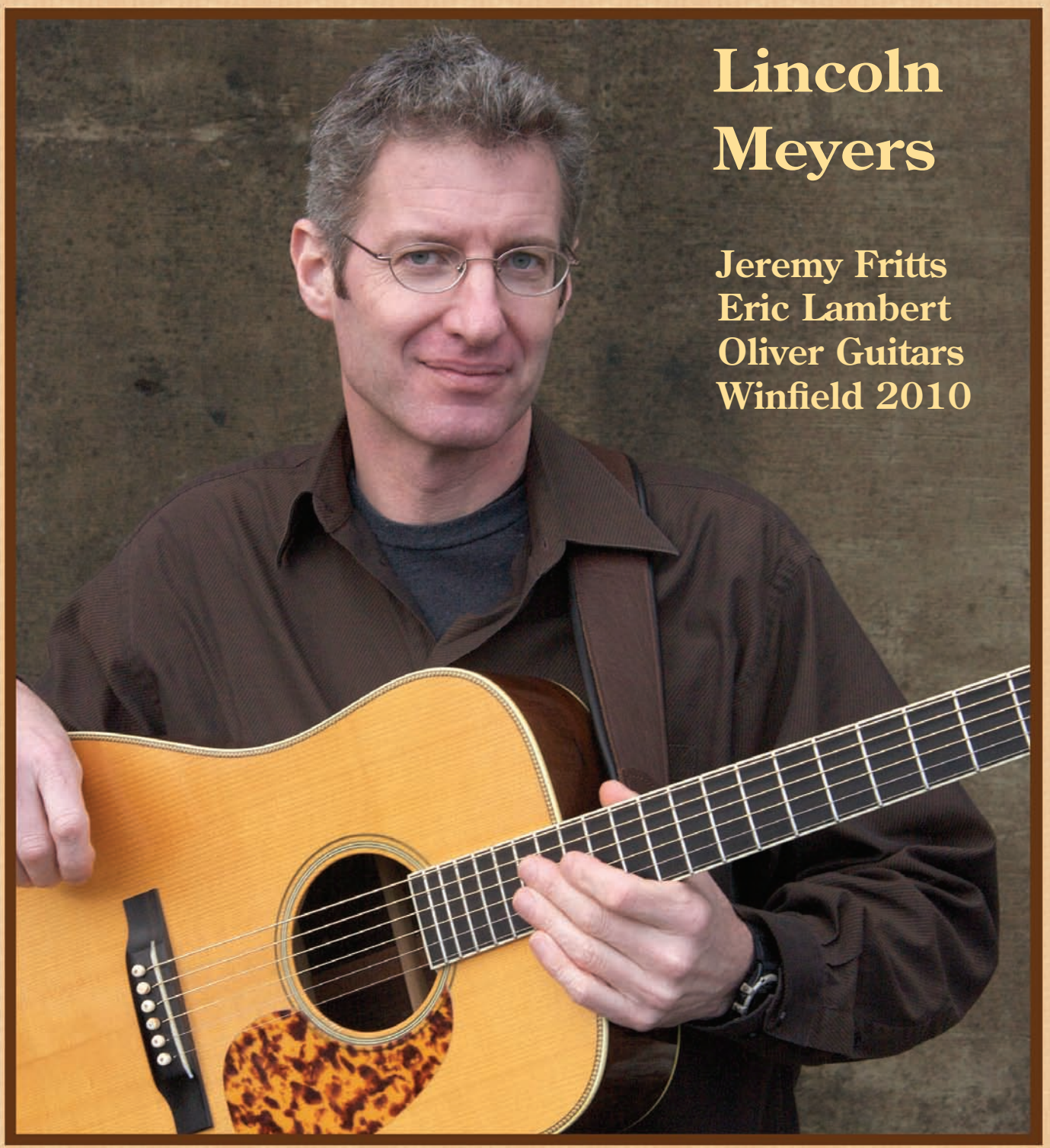
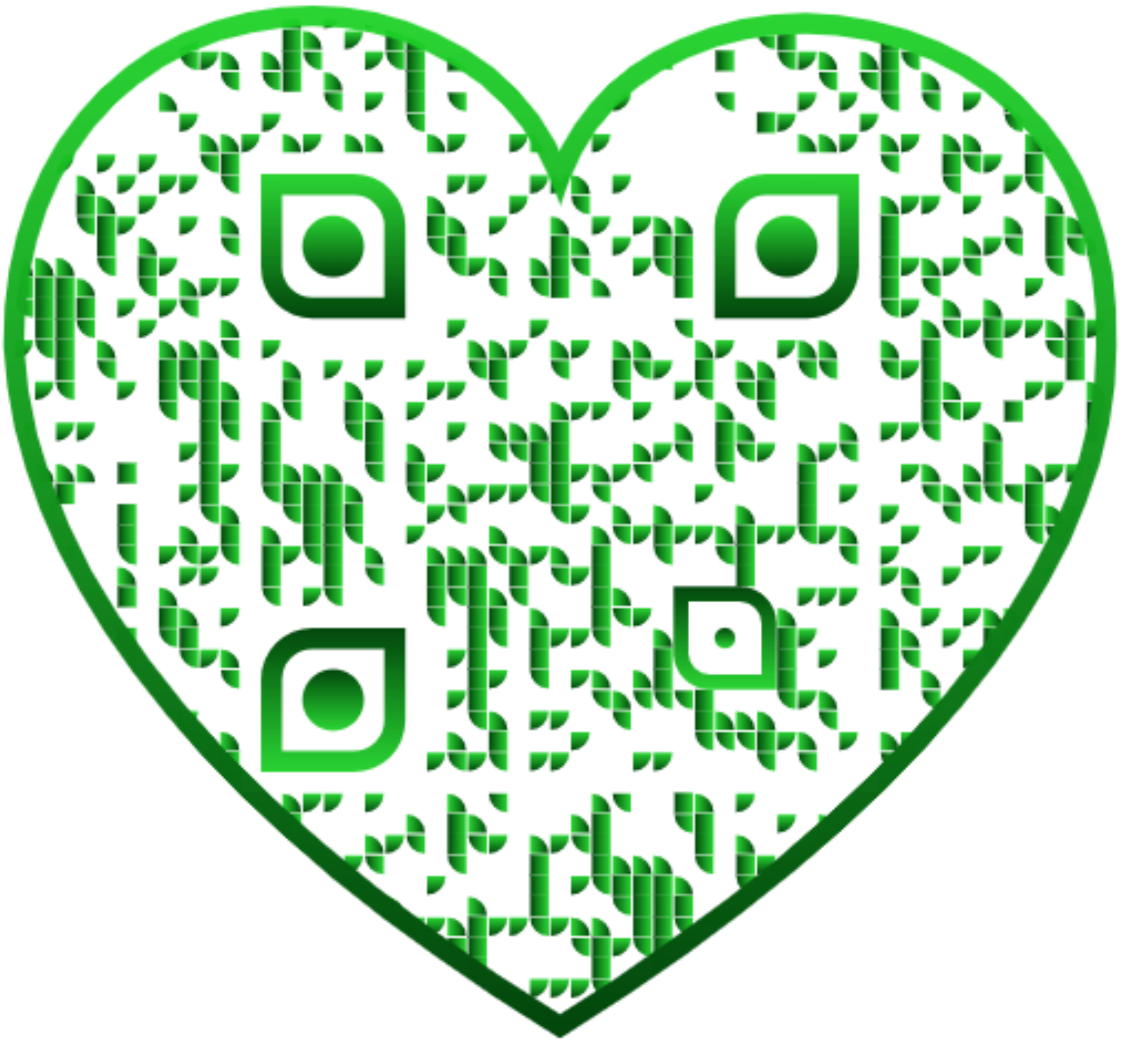
Flatpicking Guitar Magazine

Volume 15, Number 1 November/December 2010



Lincoln Meyers

Jeremy Fritts
Eric Lambert
Oliver Guitars
Winfield 2010



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Flatpicking Guitar Magazine

Volume 15, Number 1

November/December 2010
Published bi-monthly by:
High View Publications
P.O. Box 2160
Pulaski, VA 24301

Phone: (540) 980-0338
Fax: (540) 980-0557
Orders: (800) 413-8296
E-mail: highview@flatpick.com
Web Site: http://www.flatpick.com
ISSN: 1089-9855

Dan Miller - Publisher and Editor
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Subscription Rate ($US):
US $30.00 ($60.00 with CD)
Canada/Mexico $40.00
Other Foreign $43.00

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Printed in the USA

IBMA International Bluegrass Music Association MEMBER

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Are you having trouble learning how to improvise? To many flatpickers the art of improvisation is a mystery. In the 5th Volume of the *Flatpicking Essentials* series you will study various exercises that will begin to teach you the process of improvisation through the use of a graduated, step-by-step method. Through the study and execution of these exercises, you will learn how to free yourself from memorized solos! This Volume also includes "style studies" which examine the contributions of the flatpicking legends, such as Doc Watson, Clarence White, Tony Rice, Norman Blake, Dan Crary, Pat Flynn, and others. Learn techniques that helped define their styles and learn how to apply those techniques to your own solos.

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Flatpicking Essentials Volume 6: Improvisation Part II & Advanced Technique

Flatpicking Essentials, Volume 6 is divided into two main sections. The first section is Part II of our study of improvisation. Volume 5 introduced readers to a step-by-step free-form improv study method that we continue here in Volume 6.

The second section of this book is focused on advanced flatpicking technique. We approached this topic by first having Tim May record "advanced level" improvisations for nineteen different flatpicking tunes. Tim selected the tunes and went into the studio with a list of techniques, like the use of triplets, natural and false harmonics, note bending, quoting, alternate tuning, syncopation, twin guitar, minor key tunes, hybrid picking, advanced crosspicking, string skipping, etc. There are a ton of absolutely awesome flatpicking arrangements by Tim May in this book, with explanations of each technique.

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Flatpicking Essentials, Volume 7 is a 170 page book, with 67 audio tracks, that will show you how to add texture, variety, and movement to your rhythm accompaniment in the context of playing bluegrass, fiddle tune music, folk music, acoustic rock, Western swing, big band swing, and jazz. The best part of this book is that it doesn't just present you with arrangements to memorize. It teaches you how you can create and execute your own accompaniment arrangements in a variety of musical styles. Don't rely on the arrangements of others, learn a straight-forward and gradual approach to designing your own rhythm accompaniment.

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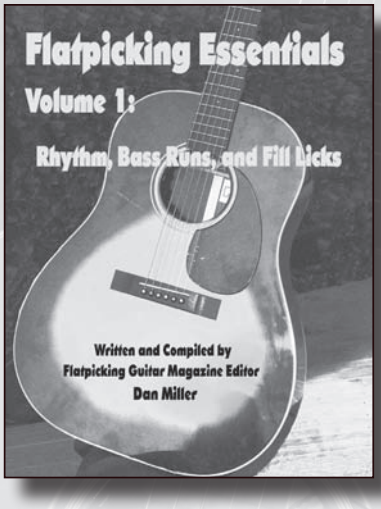

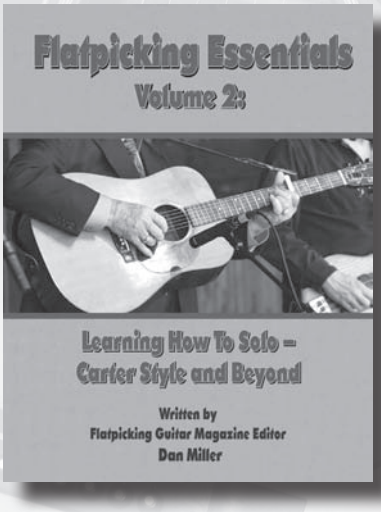

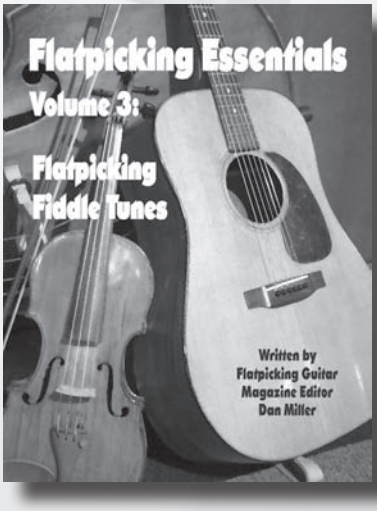

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EDITOR'S PAGE

Welcome to Volume 15!

It seems like only yesterday that I was sitting down with Steve Kaufman at the very first Kaufman camp in Maryville, Tennessee, in 1996, to conduct an interview for the first issue of *Flatpicking Guitar Magazine*. In fact, at camp that year I conducted interviews for the first three issues — Steve Kaufman, David Grier, and Jack Lawrence. That Fall I interviewed Beppe Gambetta the first time I attended Walnut Valley Festival in Winfield, Kansas. Beppe made the cover of our fourth issue. Then that next Spring, at Merlefest, I interviewed Norman Blake for the fifth issue. A few weeks ago I returned from my 15th consecutive Walnut Valley Festival and looking back, it is hard to believe that we are now starting our 15th year of publication.

I'd like to thank all of the subscribers who have been with us since the very first issue. There are a bunch of you out there! I always appreciate it when I'm vending at an event and someone walks up and says, "I've been with you guys since the very first issue!" To all of you, thanks so much for your support! Thanks to all of you who have been with us since the beginning and thanks to all of you who have joined us along the way. We couldn't do all of the things we do without the support of our subscribers. And we are looking forward to another 15 years of flatpicking!

I also want to thank all of the columnists who have been with us over the years. Most of the columnists who we started with are still with us. Some have come and gone for various reasons and some have dropped away for a while and then returned. Some of you many have noticed that Steve Pottier was absent for a number of years and came back to us two issues ago. Now, starting in this issue, our resident "flatpicking legend" columnist Dan Crary has come back to offer our subscribers valuable insights based on his decades of experience. We welcome both Steve and Dan back to the magazine.

When I first put the word out about this magazine more than a few people called and asked, "After you cover Doc Watson, Tony Rice, Norman Blake, Clarence White, and Dan Crary, who are you going to talk about?" Since we started fourteen years ago we have highlighted more than 200 professional guitar players and we still have a fairly long list of players who we have yet to feature—and new ones are popping up all the time! So, I hope that we've answered that question over the past 14 years.

Again, thanks to everyone who has given us support and encouragement over the years. It is greatly appreciated!

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Lincoln Meyers

by Dan Miller

Lincoln Meyers is living the flatpicker's dream. He is currently busy touring the country with one of the hottest new bands in bluegrass music—Frank Solivan and Dirty Kitchen—and he is loving every minute of it. The last time we featured Lincoln in *Flatpicking Guitar Magazine* was in 2004 and at that time he was playing with the New England Bluegrass Band. While that was a great band (in 2004, in addition to Lincoln on guitar, Cecil Ables on mandolin, Chris Pandolfi on the banjo, Roger Williams on Dobro, Pete Soukas on bass) each member of the band had other commitments which limited their ability to tour. Lincoln filled the gaps with studio work, teaching guitar lessons, conducting workshops and also by performing with fiddler Erica Brown.

Before I tell you about Lincoln's exciting job with the Frank Solivan Band, here's a brief background on Lincoln's musical journey for those of you who did not read the 2004 article. Lincoln grew up in a musical family near St. Louis, Missouri. He became serious about playing the guitar when he was 15 after being inspired by the guitar player in his brother's bluegrass band. He began taking lessons with that guitar player, Bob Spring, and then later from Bob's teacher, Jim Renz. Lincoln was "bit by the bug" and jumped right into learning fiddle tunes and listening to Doc Watson, Norman Blake, Tony Rice, Dan Crary, and Mark O'Connor for further inspiration. During his college years he played with a band called Missouri Breaks and also recorded with a band called the Memorial String Band.

From 1985 through 1989 Lincoln served in the United States Marine Corps. After leaving the service he moved to Richmond, Virginia, and crossed paths with some talented players and was given the opportunity to fill in with a band called Appalachian Express. The chance introduction led to further opportunities to play with other bands in the region.

A further broadening of Lincoln's exposure and experience with high caliber players occurred when he made a move to New England where he had some extended family roots. He joined a band called Crazy Creek, and later enjoyed a stint with the Bogus Family, before settling in with the New England Bluegrass Band. That experience, where he was surrounded by good players, marked a period of tremendous growth and maturation in Lincoln's playing.

Ever since Lincoln was a teenager, the lure of the road, of being full time musician was a calling that remained unfulfilled. The first opportunity to do just that came in December 2007 when he joined April Verch's band. Lincoln said, "I was at the International Bluegrass Music Association convention in 2007 and I had decided that I really wanted to try to play music full time in a touring band. I was talking with Stephen Mougin (see FGM Volume 14, Number 1 cover story) and Stephen was with April Verch's husband. I told April's husband that if she was ever looking for a guitar player, I was interested. That night April called and said that she had just lost her guitar player. I didn't have to audition because she had heard me play on Chris Pandolfi's CD and she had talked to some people who knew me and were familiar with my playing. My first

gig with her was in December of 2007."

For the next year Lincoln stayed on the road with April Verch. He said, "I played exclusively with her and we toured all over the country. We played about 170 shows in a variety of venues. It was a great experience."

April Verch's website describes her as, "A dynamic Canadian fiddler, singer and stepdancer. With her band, she plays a traditional and original repertoire that is deeply rooted in the style she grew up with in the Ottawa Valley region of Ontario." Although Lincoln was highly skilled at playing bluegrass style fiddle tunes, he found that playing music with April was a welcome challenge. He said, "A lot of the music I played with April had different time signatures and a different feel than the music a grew up playing. It was rhythmically challenging. There were a lot of complex chord changes. There were swingy and jazzy tunes, French Canadian fiddle tunes, old-timey tunes, Scotch Irish, and slow ballads. Where you played in relation to the beat would change from one song to the next. A fiddle tune might call for a metronomic guitar rhythm, but the slower tunes required more space and room to breathe. I always liked to support whatever she was doing and so I worked hard to provide tasteful rhythm. We also worked up some sections of tunes, where' I'd play the melody, while she step danced. It was different experience than playing your basic solo—because you had to pay special attention to the accents and beats that she tapped out, and I grew from that. In fact, I grew from the entire experience of being around her. She's a dynamic entertainer… full of energy, very professional, a great musician, dancer, and singer all wrapped up into one. I learned a lot from her about connecting with the audience."

After spending a year on the road with April, Lincoln decided that he wanted to try something else. A friend told him that Frank Solivan was looking for a guitar player. Frank had spent six years playing with the Navy's bluegrass band Country Current. When he left the service he was anxious to form his own band and get serious about playing music full time as a civilian. Frank and Lincoln talked on the phone and hit it off right away. His first gig with Frank's band was in May of 2009. Lincoln said, "Frank is a tour de force. A high octane mandolin player, fiddler, songwriter, and singer. He is the real deal. He is serious about playing bluegrass music as a full-time career. He is very focused and dedicated to making the band work. He is fully devoted to both the music side and the business side of the band. The whole band is invested in this music and we work hard to make it as a professional touring band. I have been in a lot of great bands in the past, like the New England Bluegrass Band. But in those bands everyone had other jobs and we all did other things. In Frank's band everyone is committed and focused to this band."

Regarding Lincoln's role in the band, Frank Solivan said, "There are so many great things to say about Lincoln. First off, he is such an easy person to talk to and travel with. His mellow disposition kind of comes through in his music too. Even when a tune is super fast, he keeps his cool and his notes seem to be effortless. Lincoln plays the fire out of bluegrass, but he has a dynamic range of guitar styles under his belt that he has molded into his own sound. I love that he doesn't sound like anyone else."

Frank Solivan and Dirty Kitchen consists of Frank Solivan on lead vocals, mandolin and fiddle, Lincoln Meyers on guitar, Mike Munford on banjo, and Stefan Custodi on bass. I had the opportunity to see the band play live twice in 2010 and after seeing them in June at the California Bluegrass Association's Father's Day Festival in Grass Valley, California, I got a copy of their CD. The band's high energy thrilled the crowd in Grass Valley. They were the hit of the festival. I was anxious to hear if they had captured that kind of energy on the CD. After listening to the first cut I could tell that they had pulled it off. It is a really great album.

With most new CDs, during the first listen, I usually immediately identify with a couple of tunes that end up being my favorites. After hearing the first cut of the Dirty Kitchen CD, "Driftin' Apart," I knew that it would be one of my favorites. Then the second song, "July You're A Woman," came on and I thought, "I like that one even better than the first!" Number three, "Hello Friend," was another winner! With each new track I found myself thinking that each song was a tune that I could listen to over and over. There is not a weak tune in the bunch. It is evident that the band has worked very hard on this project and their hard work has paid off. Lincoln's guitar playing throughout is strong, clean and powerful and his arrangements are interesting and captivating. We have provided a sample from the Dirty Kitchen album on the audio CD that is the companion to this issue. Take a listen to "Runaway Ramp" and see if you agree.

When asked about his experiences playing with a full time touring band, Lincoln said, "With April I learned there's more to being a musician than technique and proficiency. You can execute that lick that you have been practicing for months, or you can blow it, but the audience may not know or may not care one way or the other. Through it all, you have to maintain your enjoyment, keep the audience engaged. If

Frank Solivan and Dirty Kitchen: (left to right) Lincoln Meyers, Stefan Custodi, Frank Solivan, Mike Munford

Frank Solivan and Dirty Kitchen

you're having fun they probably are too. However, it is hard to reach that place in every show. It takes some work to always find that groove and not get side tracked by bad sound, or bad lighting, or some other distraction in the audience. I've learned to go with the flow and not fight against elements that are out of my control. I've also learned the value of a good sound check. It is important to make sure you are hearing everything the way that you want to hear it so that you feel comfortable while you are playing."

Much of the Frank Solivan and Dirty Kitchen's repertoire is hard-driving, up-tempo, fast paced bluegrass, and Lincoln demonstrates the ability to stay right in step with the blazing fiddle and banjo players in the band. In fact, he makes it look easy. So, I asked Lincoln what he recommends to students who want to learn how to play faster. He said, "There is no magic pill. You've got to know that it takes a lot of work and it is not going to come over night. I suggest that students first work with just the melody of a song. Learn to play it cleanly and smoothly at a slow tempo. Play with a metronome and make sure that you feel comfortable with the right hand alternating pick pattern. When you are able to play clean and smooth at a slow tempo, you can then bump up the metronome. Bump it up in increments until you start hearing mistakes. Stay at that tempo until you can play cleanly, comfortably and build a good muscle memory. Then you can bump up the speed again. Speed is all about developing good pick control and you have to do that slow before you can do it fast."

Today, when he is not playing with the band, Lincoln maintains his speed by playing along with recordings. He said, "I have a play list of tunes from different CDs that are quick tempo. I'll play rhythm along with a song a few times as a warm up and then I'll start picking along with the recording." Lincoln adds, "Many people want to play fast right now, but don't think about what it sounds like. If you try to play fast and find that it sounds muted or sloppy, slow down and build back up. Frank plays really fast and sometimes I have to adjust my note choices and my technique so that I can keep up with him and still produce a clean and smooth sound. For instance, instead of picking all eighth notes I might play less notes or use slides and pull-offs."

In a final statement on playing fast, Lincoln said, "Speed isn't everything. Some tunes rip so fast that I really have nothing to say, so I don't. I think that sometimes you also have to know when to lay out and feel comfortable with that. It is important to have something to say when you take a solo. At slower tempos it is easier to say something meaningful. You don't just want to put a bunch of notes out there just because you can."

Improvisation is another topic that students always ask about at flatpicking workshops. Since Lincoln spent a number of years teaching private lessons, and workshops all over the country, I asked him to give us his thoughts about learning how to improvise. Lincoln said that there are several ways to approach learning improvisation. One is by learning how to insert licks and phrases around a song's melody, another is to learn how to alter or embellish the melody through experimentation, and the third is to learn how to improvise over chord progressions based on a knowledge of chord shapes and scales.

The first component of learning how to improvise involves learning an "arsenal" of basic licks that can be played in various keys and then practice combine those licks into phrases that will fit a song's melody. He said, "You build a bag of ideas that you can fit into songs by putting licks and phrases together in ways that make sense to you. As time goes by you learn more phrases and with practice and experience you learn where they fit and where they don't."

Secondly, Lincoln suggests, "When you are learning a fiddle tune variation, take the first phrase and ask yourself, "How can I play this differently? Take what you already know and come up with different ideas." When working to come up with different ideas, you don't have to completely change your solo. At first, just change small sections. Over time, as you continue to woodshed on a tune, you will create a totally new solo, but don't try to do it all in one sitting.

Lincoln also feels that a good knowledge of the fingerboard is helpful. He encourages all of his students to learn the notes on the low E and A strings of the guitar, learn the closed position chords that can be played using the low E and A string notes as the root of the chord, and then learn how to play scales from those roots. He said, "Learning scales and chord shapes can be very useful because they can help you visualize the fingerboard."

Another way that Lincoln suggests that you practice improvising, is to record a few simple chord progressions and then improvise over the changes using scales and chord tones as a road map. He said, "You can be very academic with it and think about the chord positions, chord tones, and scales as you are playing, or you can be less academic and play by ear and by feel and learn to intuitively develop a sense of what fits and what doesn't." By practicing how to insert common licks and phrases around a song melody, learning how to develop melodic variations, and by learning how

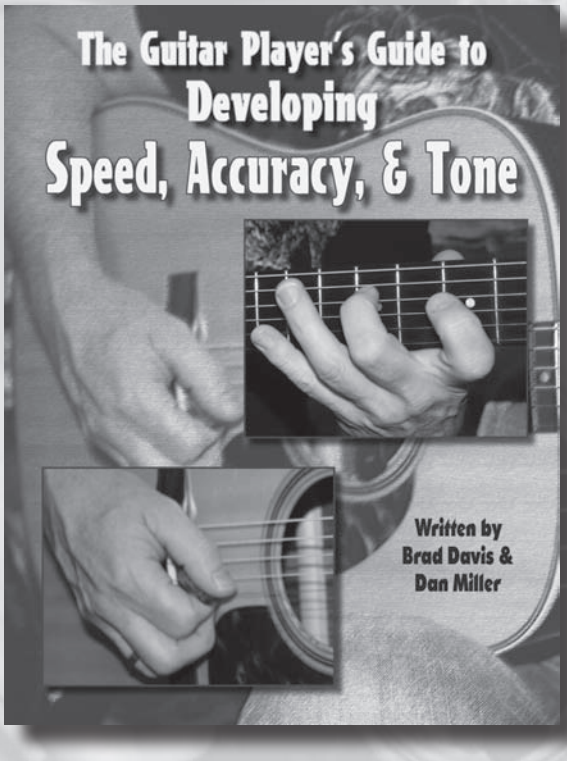
to simply jam over chord progressions, the student can eventually learn how to combine the three approaches and be able to create improvisations that are tasteful and fit the song.

One way that you can learn how to develop an ability to create melodic variations is to study someone else's arrangement of a tune that you already know how to play. Analyze how the new arrangement varies from the arrangement you already play, study any new "cool" licks or phrases, and then try to incorporate some of them into the version that you already know. You don't have to completely learn the new version, simply take out a few bars here and there and then substitute them for those bars in your version. To give you practice, we are providing two transcriptions of Lincoln Meyers playing the flatpick standard, "Salt Creek" on page 11. Lincoln recorded this with fiddler Erica Brown.

When asked about his equipment and gear, Lincoln said that on the road he mainly uses a Gibson J-45 Banner. Gibson produced this model between 1942 and 1946. The "Banner" is on the headstock and reads "Only A Gibson Is Good Enough." Lincoln thinks his was made in 1943. It has mahogany back and sides and a red spruce top. He also travels with a 1964 D-18 and if the gig is close enough for him to drive he takes his 1937 Martin D-18. He also owns and records with a 1996 Collings Clarence White model that has Brazilian rosewood back and sides.

Regarding his pick choice, Lincoln has, for years, used a Proplec 1.5 mm, and a triangle shaped tortoise shell pick. But recently he has discovered the Blue Chip 60, which, in Lincoln's opinion, sounds close to a tortoise shell. Lincoln says he likes the way it rolls off the strings in part because of its edges are bevelled perfectly. He likes D'Addario J-17 strings, but also uses Elixir phosphor bronze strings because the Elixirs last a long time.

Frank Solivan and Dirty Kitchen is a very busy band touring all across the country. If you see that they are coming to your town, I recommend you check them out. You can also get taste of some of their music on the band's website,' DirtyKitchenband.com. Also visit Lincoln on My Space and Facebook.



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Audio CD
Track 3

Runaway Ramp

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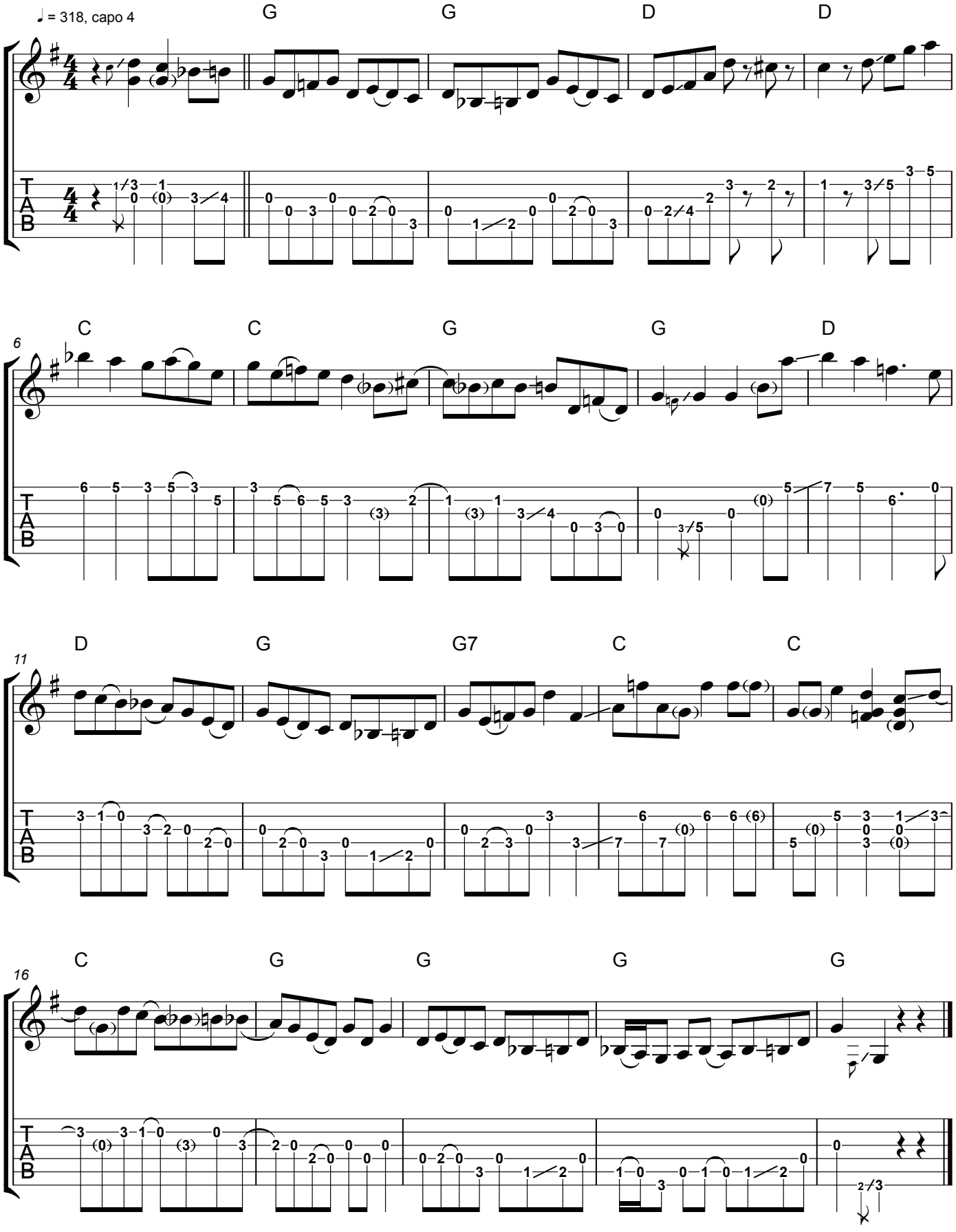
Transcribed by Alois Kleewein



Audio CD
Track 4

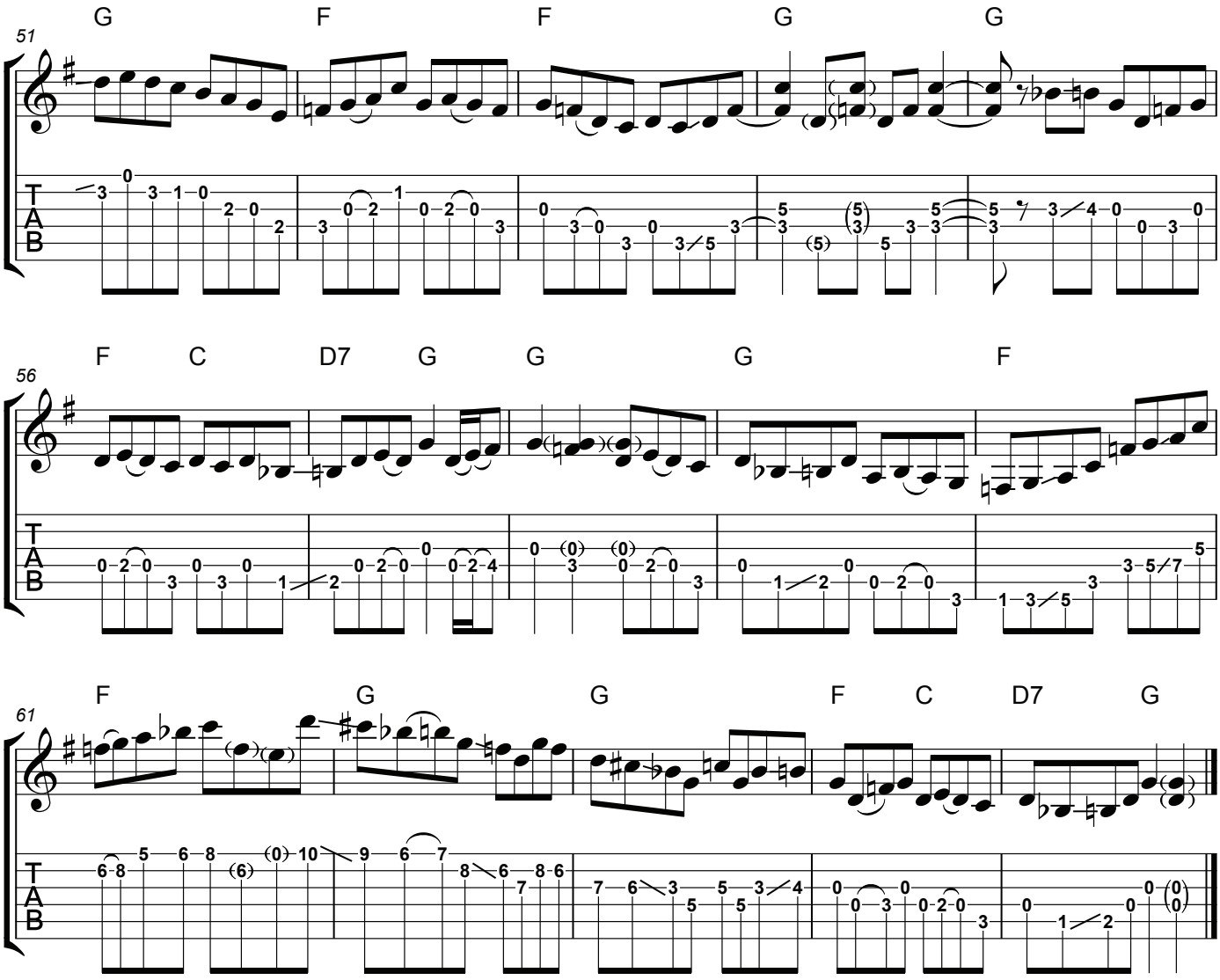
Salt Creek

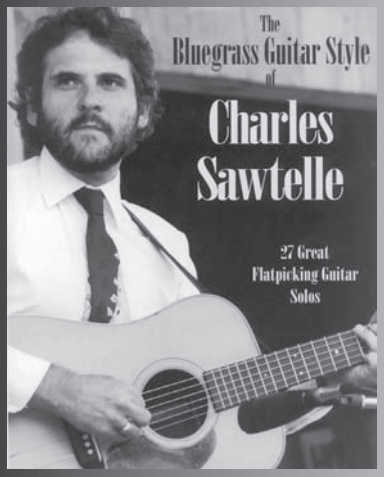
Arranged by Lincoln Meyers
Transcribed by Alois Kleewein

♩ = 260, capo 2

Salt Creek (con't)

Salt Creek (con't)





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Bluegrass Rhythm Guitar

by Joe Carr

Here is the rhythm to an Alan Munde original guitar instrumental from my 1980 Ridge Runner instrumental album *Otter Nonsense*. The tune was untitled when Alan played it for me so I called it "Restaurant Swing," a pun on "western" swing and the fact that most of us wind up playing our original instrumentals in restaurants as background music.

The players were the Country Gazette band of those years: Alan Munde (banjo), Roland White (mandolin), Mike Anderson (bass) and me on guitar.

The tune is arranged in the keys of G and A. Many flatpickers avoid playing in open A preferring to capo at the second fret and to use the more familiar G position chords. Open A, however, presents many attractive options and can spark new life into tired playing. Songs in B, for example, take on a new character when capoed at the second fret and played in A position.

Here is the chord progression which follows an ABA form:

1 1 4 4
6 6 5 5
1 1 4 (4#4dim)
1 (16) (25) 1
3 3 6 6
2 2 5 5

The diminished chord form in measure 12 is one of two shapes I use all the time and should be memorized. The E7 chord in measure 32 is an example of an important music rule I learned years ago: to change to any key, use the 5 chord of the new key to smooth the transition.

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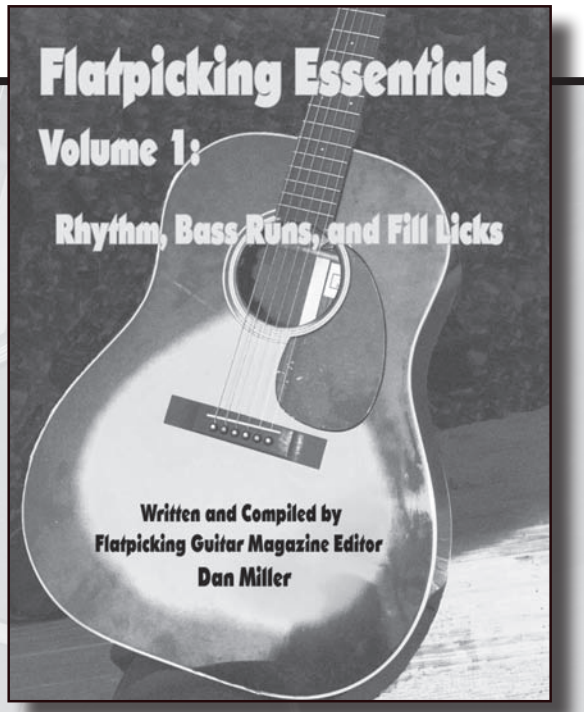

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Audio CD
Tracks 5

Restaurant Swing Rhythm

Arranged by Joe Carr

Restaurant Swing Rhythm (con't)

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Beginner's Page

by Dan Huckabee

Little Georgia Rose (and the Quick-4)

One of the most popular jam tunes penned by the Father of Bluegrass is "Little Georgia Rose." It's been recorded and performed by too many to name, and the majority have done it in the key of B, but Bill himself recorded it in C. I think G-position, capoed to the 4th fret, is the ideal platform for the guitar.

This is a fairly standard three-chord melody with one anomaly. It contains an element that is referred to as a "Quick-4." Since we're going to be learning it in the key of G, we would be playing a "Quick-C," because C is the 4-chord in the key of G. In "Little Georgia Rose," the Quick-C happens to start in the middle of a measure. Here's how it works: The song starts with one measure of G, followed by a measure of G/C, then back to G for the next measure. Another example of a Bill Monroe "Quick-4" song that comes to mind is "Goldrush" but the Quick-4 in "Goldrush" comes in at the beginning of the measure rather than the middle.

So immediately, the Quick-4 sets up a problem. How do we create a solo around this little bump? Answer: We need to state the melody and we need to make sure that the notes we choose fit the "Quick-4."

Did I mention that this is a "verse break?" Most bluegrass songs use the verse rather than the chorus for instrumental solos, and "Little Georgia Rose" is no exception.

Did I mention that the first half of the verse to "Little Georgia Rose" is almost identical to the second half of the verse? This means that the Quick-4 is going to occur twice, and I created one lick for the first half and a different lick for the second half.

There are several other noteworthy components to this solo, but they're not really unusual.

The most important thing is to have another good solid solo to add to your growing repertoire and to strive to play it with consistent timing.

If you'd like any personal assistance, give me a call toll free at Musicians-Workshop.com 800-543-6215. Good luck and keep taking those baby steps.

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Flatpicking Guitar Magazine
Audio mp3 Archive
Volume 3, Number 6 to Volume 13, Number 1
(September 1999 to October 2008)

Audio CD
Tracks 7-8

Little Georgia Rose

Arranged by Dan Huckabee

Kaufman's Corner

by Steve Kaufman

Santa Claus

Hi Friends and welcome back to my corner of the magazine. I've got a great tune for you this issue that I learned from Kenny Baker years ago: "Santa Claus" written by Bill Monroe. I used to study Kenny Baker. I loved his songs and style. You will hear a lot of Kenny Baker songs on my CDs and also in my style of play.

This tune doesn't go very fast so it will not lose its bluegrass swing feel and bounce. The slow version on the CD was recorded at 155bpm and the faster version around 180 where it would be played.

Looking at the pages you will see many measures with tied notes. This gives us some of that Bill Monroe swing feel. Looking at the three pick-up notes at the very beginning of the piece you will notice the eighth note by itself followed by two more eighth notes. The arrows show the right-hand pick direction but the reason for starting on an up-beat is that it is hit in the imaginary pick-up measure on the "+" beat of 3. Count "1+2+3" then start playing on "+4+" (using up-down-up).

Looking at most of the other measures you will find tied notes (a slur over the two eighth notes). If the numbers change, it would signify a hammer-on or a pull-off but when the number is the same with a tie or slur over it you hold it for the combined time value of the two notes. What happens in this case are two up-swings in a row with the faked down-swing between them keeping the right hand in time. I've marked a lot of the measures for you to watch out for and then stopped marking them because they all follow the same pattern.

There are a few funny fingering spots that I've marked for you and besides those and the right hand work you shouldn't have too much trouble here.

Have fun with this tune and learn it by the time the holidays are with us.
Let me know how it treats you.

Bye for now,
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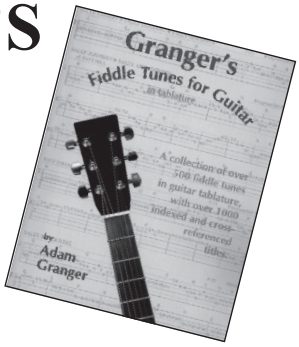
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Audio CD
Tracks 9 & 10

Santa Claus

Arranged by Steve Kaufman

Key of G

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Santa Claus (con't)

Taking It To The Next Level: God Rest Ye, Merry Gentleman

by John Carlini

I'll admit it! I love Christmas, the holiday season, and the music that accompanies it. We collect special ornaments and around Thanksgiving they start to get displayed, hung from the ceiling (and wherever), and the house and yard get lit up!

Christmas and holiday music often defy the standard 32-bar form and the common chord progressions of popular tunes.

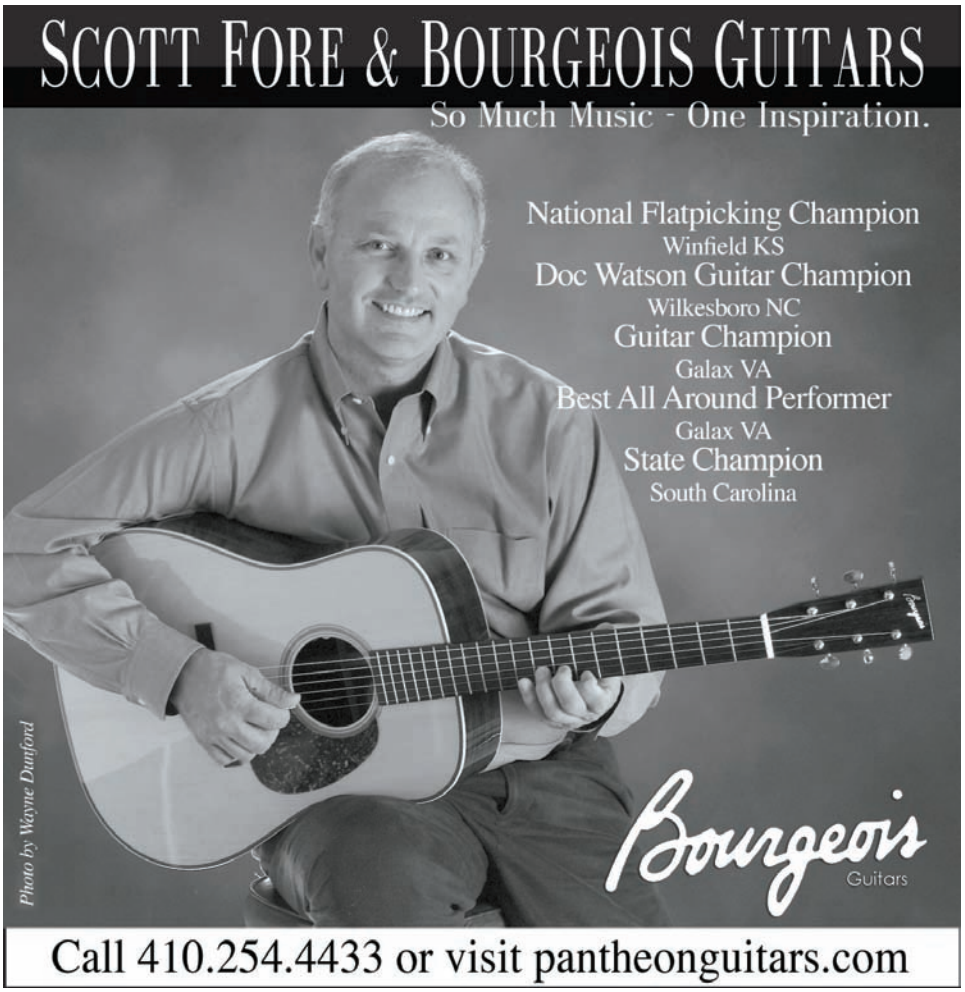
"God Rest Ye, Merry Gentlemen" is one of those traditional carols with which we are familiar. According to Wikipedia, it is mentioned in Charles Dickens' 1843 classic "A Christmas Carol": "At the first sound of 'God rest ye merry gentlemen, may nothing you dismay', Scrooge seized the ruler with such energy of action, that the singer fled in terror, leaving the keyhole to the fog and even more congenial frost!"

Here's how I approached it. The first step was to take a look at piano sheet music. For this type of tune that might be the only authentic source available to you. I played through the piece on the keyboard and did a modern chord analysis. Every vertical structure in the sheet music represents a chord. Once I penciled in these chords, I was ready to bring it over to the guitar. (See the sheet music on the next page. The second line is the same as the first, so I didn't need to write that out.)

Next, I played through it again, this time on the guitar. Then I got away from it for a while and let some ideas develop in my mind. Finally, I wrote a guitar arrangement that combined some of the traditional harmonies with more modern harmonic ideas.

The audio contains a walk-through of suggested fingerings for all the chords… and there are plenty of them! I hope you enjoy playing this carol and wish you all a wonderful holiday season.

Please visit John's web site (www.johncarlini.com) to sign up for the latest performance and teaching info and acoustic music news. John is now giving live one-on-one lessons on guitar and 5-string banjo using Skype technology. More info is available on the web site. While you are there be sure to check out the CD A Christmas Gift, featuring John with vocalist Bill Robinson.



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God Rest Ye, Merry Gentleman
(chord analysis)

1. God rest you mer - ry, gen - tle - men, Let noth - ing you dis -
2. In Beth - le - hem, in Jew - ry, This bless - ed Babe was
3. From God our heav'n - ly Fa - ther, A bless - ed An - gel
may, Re - mem - ber Christ our Sa - vi - our Was born on Christ-mas Day; To
born. And laid with - in a man - ger Up - on this bless - ed morn; The
came; And un - to cer - tain Shep-herds Brought ti - dings of the same; How
CHORUS
save us all from Sa - tan's pow'r When we were gone a - stray.
which His Moth - er Ma - ry, Did noth - ing take in scorn.
that in Beth - le - hem was born The Son of God by Name.
O__
ti - dings of com - fort and joy, com - fort and joy, O__ ti - dings of com - fort and joy.

Audio CD
Track 11-12

God Rest Ye, Merry Gentleman

Arranged by John Carlini

Silver Bells
by Dan Crary

Silver Bells

I remember Christmas Eve 1949 in eastern Kansas: it was the sound of my Dad's '38 Studebaker's tires crunching through the deep snow; reflections of colored lights on the whited-out yards of the neighbors; sweet-smelling, stinging-cold winter air that rode the high plains westerlies from the Colorado front range right into our front yard; the fragrant smell of Half & Half tobacco smoke from my old man's pipe; the long ride through the dark streets to where Grandpa and Aunt Ruby had Christmas dinner and presents all ready; and after the festivities ended, falling into that deep slumber that is the luxury of children who feel safe on the ride home from Christmas. It was a sweet moment, and I'm glad to remember it.

But thirty-five years later, it was a little different. My wife Laree and I lived in Orange County, CA, a great place, but not much for Christmas fantasies. Oh no, it was perpetual sunshine, everybody's front yard a miniature of Forest Lawn, and autumn came about three days before Christmas Eve when my neighbor's little ornamental maple tree turned red and pathetically dropped its little leaves on the perpetually green lawn. Then Christmas Day would be sunny and 89 degrees, and instead of jingle bells, you'd hear desert Santa Ana winds stirring up the dried-out palm trees.

So the question becomes, if you ever had a cozy and safe childhood Christmas, how do you get the feeling back in the midst of a chaotic, complicated, globally warmed 21st century holiday season? For me, the old feeling comes back, sometimes, in Christmas music. It came back the first time I ever heard Middle Ages Advent music, and recently at the annual Christmas concert of the Waverly Consort at The Cloisters in New York (if you're in New York, don't miss it). It even came back recently at a Christmas party where John Doan, Mason Williams, and neighbor Hugh Hoeger and I and our respective spouses hilariously massacred a few carols and got the giggles staggering through all 20(!) verses of "We Three Kings" (seemed like flippin' forever).

But once in a while, maybe when you're not expecting it, even a pop Christmas music tune will sneak up and get to you with the old feeling. A piece that does it for me is "Silver Bells." This one never fails: Christmas comes back, I get it, and for a few moments the chaos and clamour recede. Anyway, that's what music is supposed to do for you, and happily, sometimes it does. So in today's column, "Silver Bells."

In this arrangement, observe that the notes with dots over or under them are harmonics. Also try playing the chords as an arpeggio, especially on the E9, G6+9, and A9. The harmonics over those chords gets about as close to bells as I could manage.

Calendar note; I look forward to seeing you characters of the flatpicking persuasion at River City Festival in Portland, January 7-9, and at Marv's Music in Winlock, WA on Feb. 5 for an all-day series of workshops and a concert with me with Thunderation (Steve Spurgin and Keith Little). We'll try to behave ourselves.

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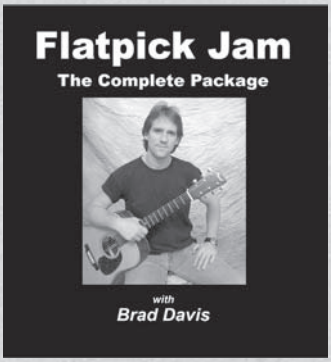
On this DVD-Rom disc you will find all of the *Flatpick Jam* (play-along) tracks for the 48 tunes that appear on all of the Volumes of Brad Davis' *Flatpick Jam* series. Additionally, in the "Flatpick Jam Tabs" folder on this disc, you will find a folder for each tune that includes transcriptions provided by Brad (the numbered transcriptions), plus any arrangement of that particular tune that has appeared in *Flatpicking Guitar Magazine* during our first 10 years of publication. This means that you will get anywhere from 4 to 10 different variations of every tune tabbed out. Additionally, the audio tracks that are companions to those FGM arrangements are also included. This is the ultimate *Flatpick Jam* package and a must have resource for anyone who wants to build their flatpicking repertoire, learn variations, and study different arrangements of all of the standard jam session tunes. And you are able to practice all of your arrangements at four different tempos by jamming along with Brad Davis!



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Silver Bells

Audio CD
Track 14-15

Arranged by Dan Crary

Silver Bells (con't)

Winfield 2010

By Chris Thiessen

2010 Champion Jason Shaw accepts his new Collings guitar from Jim Baggett

If there is a place to which each serious flatpicker should pilgrimage at least once, it's Winfield, Kansas, around the middle of September, for the Walnut Valley Festival. Last year I was talking with Dan Miller about Winfield, and he was amazed that I had never been. As July approached, he invited me to help him out at the *Flatpicking Guitar Magazine* booth at Winfield. The stars aligned (that is, several large projects at work suddenly ground to a halt), and I found myself able to go. My motive was transparent: I wanted to experience the flatpicking guitar competition. So was Dan's: he needed help at the booth. A fair exchange.

So I packed up the trusty Studebaker Conestoga early Wednesday morning and set off across the plains toward Kansas. By 3PM I turned off US 77 onto US 160 and pulled into the day parking lot. Since I currently live in Iowa, I was familiar with the layout: a basic county fairgrounds. Vendor booths are located in a cinderblock bunker under the grandstand, and I quickly found Dan and helped him tote boxes and other booth materials from his tightly-packed car into the bunker. A little more than an hour later we were set up and ready for Thursday morning.

Slaking our thirst with a bottle of water (temps were in the high 80s), we strolled around the ground. Dan pointed out the stages (official and unofficial) and we walked through some of the closer campgrounds. Dan's a long-time attendee, so he chatted with almost everyone. Since the fabled "land rush" had been Saturday (postponed a day due to rain), I was amazed that most of these campers had been on site for four days. "Oh, ours is just a campsite," some folks noted. "You need to go deeper into the grove to see the elaborate campsites."

Since both Dan and I had traveled at least 8 hours Wednesday, we decided to turn in. For Winfield, Dan rents a nearby hotel room, so with the prospect of a shower, a change of clothes, and a hot meal we left the fairgrounds and drove up the road.

Long-time Winfield attendees talk about the great floods, or the persistent heat or cold, or a variety of nasty weather incidents. No one mentioned tornados, but around 7PM that evening Winfield experienced a close call with a tornado. The campsites were evacuated into the concrete bunkers under the grandstand, but no injuries occurred. Power was out over the city until about 12:30, which gave a lot of folks the chance to sit outdoors, calm down, share some beverages in the cool evening air, and chat.

Thursday and Friday were beautiful days, with highs in the low 90s. Every few hours I'd step away from the booth to wander around to the various stages, to see the bands and watch the crowds. I also wandered around the other booths. Jim Triggs was the next booth down, Stephen Gallagher was across the aisle, and massive Mass Street Music assemblage was one building down. Both Thursday and Friday evenings I intended to come back to the festival after we closed down the booth and explore the campsites and jams. But after 12-hour days at the booth and then dinner, by 10:30PM Dan and I just basically passed out.

But finally it was Saturday. We drove in early so that I could get a good seat. We stopped by the practice area just outside of the competition hall and met several of the competitors. Invariably the question was "what's your number?" (except for Robin Kessinger, who just wanted to know where the coffee was).

I found a great seat up front next to Rolly Brown, who patiently answered most of my questions about the 35 competitors in the first round. I was noting names and tunes and numbers, and keeping a personal tab on who I thought had a chance. When the first round finished and the names of the five finalists announced, I was surprised to learn that I had chosen four of the five. (Actually, I had chosen 10 names, so it was a lucky coincidence that I had that many.)

When the second round began, I moved closer to the stage, ostensibly to get better photos, but more to watch the competitors' right and left hands. I quickly realized what an incredibly hard task the judges faced. The five finalists – Andrew Hatfield, Roy Curry, Jason Shaw, Eric Hardin, and Allen Shadd – were all excellent and, as far as I could see and hear, were not making any obvious errors. All I could do was watch: the Winfield competition was way beyond any expectations I might have imagined.

When the second round ended, I had absolutely no clue as to who might merit this year's title. Hardin and Curry (a two-time winner) wound up with plaques. Andrew Hatfield (a first-time Winfield competitor) earned third place, newly married Allen Shadd (a former winner) took second place, and Jason Shaw of Lincoln, Nebraska, walked away with the first place and the Collings Winfield, and became the second three-time National Flatpicking Guitar Champion.

The rest of Saturday was a buzz of activity, as various winners and contestants dropped by the FGM booth. And again, as much as I wanted to, by the time the booth closed and we had dinner, we were exhausted.

Sunday was anticlimactic, although lots of folks stopped at the booth to chat.

Late that afternoon we began the process of packing Dan's car, and by 4PM it was at capacity. With the exception of the Mercury astronauts, I don't think that I had ever seen anyone packed so tightly into a vehicle. But Dan was bound for California via Utah and Colorado, and I turned the oxen team towards the east.

I had lots of time during the drive home to listen to new CDs and think about the experience. Winfield was everything I expected: excellent music, interesting folks, and a really superb flatpicking competition. I think that September pilgrimage may become an annual event.

A Follow-Up with Jason Shaw
By Chris Thiessen

From a flatpicking viewpoint, one of the highlights of 2010 Winfield was Jason Shaw's third win as National Flatpicking Champion. Remarkably humble for such a prestigious honor, Jason joins Steve Kaufman in that exclusive flatpicking society, although Jason's first win (in 1993) did not occur until seven years after Steve won his third championship (in 1986). In all, 24 years passed before Winfield would see a second three-time champion. In a sense, Jason becomes the "next generation" of Winfield champions. Since Jason also holds two National Fiddle Championships, it would not be surprising to see Jason try for a third fiddle title, thus becoming the only "double triple" winner to date. For that, though, we'll have to wait until 2013. But Jason noted that the Shaw family will be back at Winfield next year, if only for the esoteric fiddle jams at the Kessingers' campsite.

Day-to-day life has not changed that much for Jason. He still works with his brother and also plays with him in their band Sandy Creek Pickers (www.sandycreekbluegrass.com). Jason indicated that there might be a flatpicking CD and a fiddle CD on the horizon, and the band is trying to put the wraps on a CD as well. Of course, Jason now has a Collings Winfield guitar for almost every room in his house, so he doesn't have to walk as far when he wants to play. "The guitar I won this year has really become one of my favorites. It really has great tone, and it's hard to find a new guitar that has that older sound."

One of the interesting sidelights was that Jason (as well as his brother, John, who won Winfield in 1992) has used the same guitar—his father's 50s-era D-18—for all of his competitions. That makes the Shaw D-18 probably the winningest guitar on the planet!

Jason also teaches a small number of fiddle and guitar students, stressing the importance of tone, clarity, and musicality. He'd like to have more students, but between family, work, and his own musical endeavors, his time is limited.

When asked about preparing for contests, Jason admitted that for his second win he didn't practice as much as he thought he should. "So I was surprised —and grateful—when my name was called." But after 2004 "I began to think about winning three times, and as this year's Winfield approached I started seriously practicing at least once each day from February or March on." Jason's one regret? "I'm sorry that my brother wasn't there."

Somehow I feel that Winfield 2011 will be another opportunity for at least one of the Shaw brothers to climb into the competition stage at Winfield. And yes, whoever competes gets to play Dad's D-18.

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Sharpening the Axe
by Jeff Troxel

"Away in a Manger"

Hello everybody, and welcome back. Since we're approaching the holidays I thought I'd present a couple of solo arrangements of the old Christmas carol "Away in a Manger." I decided to write two versions to give you an idea of how a basic version can be spiced up. If you haven't tried playing chords and melody together then Version 1 might be all you need to work on for now. I wrote the arrangements in the key of C, and this version stays in first position, using familiar chord shapes.

The concept for Version 1 is simple: you'll play a chord on the first beat of each measure and let it ring underneath the melody. At times you'll need to do some unusual fingerings allow the melody and harmony to work together. I've indicated some left-hand fingerings to help you work it out. An example of this is in measure seven. Notice how the first finger reaches behind the second finger to play the A note on the 3rd string. That note is the melody, but in this case it's not a part of the C chord. It'll be easier to execute if you play the A with the side of the fingertip.

In both versions, rest-strokes are essential in order to make the melody note stand out. That means you need to push the pick through the highest note in the chord and bring it to rest on the next adjacent string. If the highest note is on the 1st string, play just as if there were another string to rest to. That way your sound will remain consistent throughout.

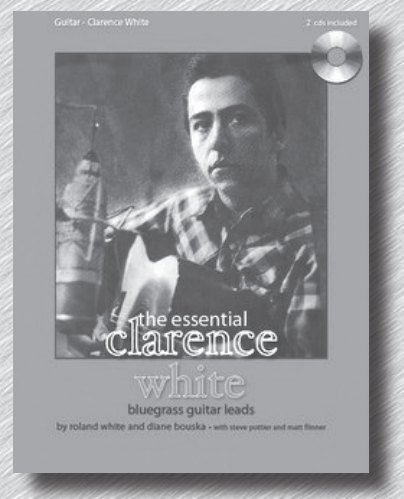
Version 2 introduces some different voicings and more harmonic complexity. The fun starts with the very first C chord. Notice that the first finger needs to play the 5th and 1st strings while dampening the 4th string. This makes for a nice open-sounding chord. The same technique is employed on a similar C voicing in measure 9.

Notice the use of the C7 chord in measures 2 and 10. It creates a stronger drive to the F chord than just a C triad. For you music theory buffs, this is called a "secondary dominant." Another secondary dominant occurs in measure fourteen when an E7 is used to create a strong drive into the Am chord.

In measures 3 and 11, the low C that carries through the measure is called a "pedal tone." It rings out while the upper voices of the chord move, much the way an organ player might use a pedal to sustain a bass note while playing other chords over the top.

Finally, I couldn't resist throwing in a couple of altered notes on certain chords. They work well with this song and I hope your ears will come to appreciate these sounds. They're not appropriate in all musical situations, but we can get away with it here without "rocking the cradle" too much.

Both arrangements can be played with either a pick or pick and fingers. On the recording I used only a pick, but you should try it both ways to see which you prefer. Have fun with these arrangements and let me know how they treat you. Have a happy holiday season, and I'll see you in 2011.



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Audio CD
Tracks 16 & 17

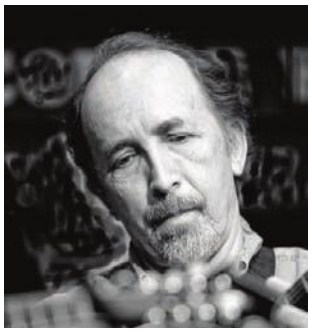
Away In A Manger
Version 1

Arranged by Jeff Troxel

Away In A Manger
Version 2

Ashland Breakdown

by Steve Pottier



It's just past the 99th anniversary of the birth of Bill Monroe, so I thought it would be good to present one of his tunes, "Ashland Breakdown," for this issue of *Flatpicking Guitar Magazine*. This is a three-part tune in the key of C. On the Bear Family recording I have, Monroe only plays the 2nd and 3rd parts, so I based this break on the fiddle break since the fiddles play all 3 parts.

The first part is probably the trickiest. The fiddle plays the first two measures all on the E string, but uses the G note at the third fret instead of the open E. This would be difficult to do on guitar (impossible for me!), so some modification or adjustment is in order. There are some different ways to attack this problem on guitar:

• Start with the original melody, find out where it lies on the guitar (original fiddle line shown below). Although I can't play this exact version, one of the things I like about it is the articulation (how the notes are played and released).

• Begin exploring to see if there are other positions on the guitar that will allow you to play the notes (even if it sacrifices articulation). In the "low register option" I found a way to play the notes an octave lower. It keeps the articulation, and is very playable. Not a bad choice!

• The "high register option" has the notes played in a nice compact form out of the C chord "F" shape up the neck. Of course you don't normally play the A note (6th) in the major chord shape, but the F shape is what I visualize here. Very playable, nice tone, not much left hand movement required. A pretty good choice, but I'm wanting some of that articulation...

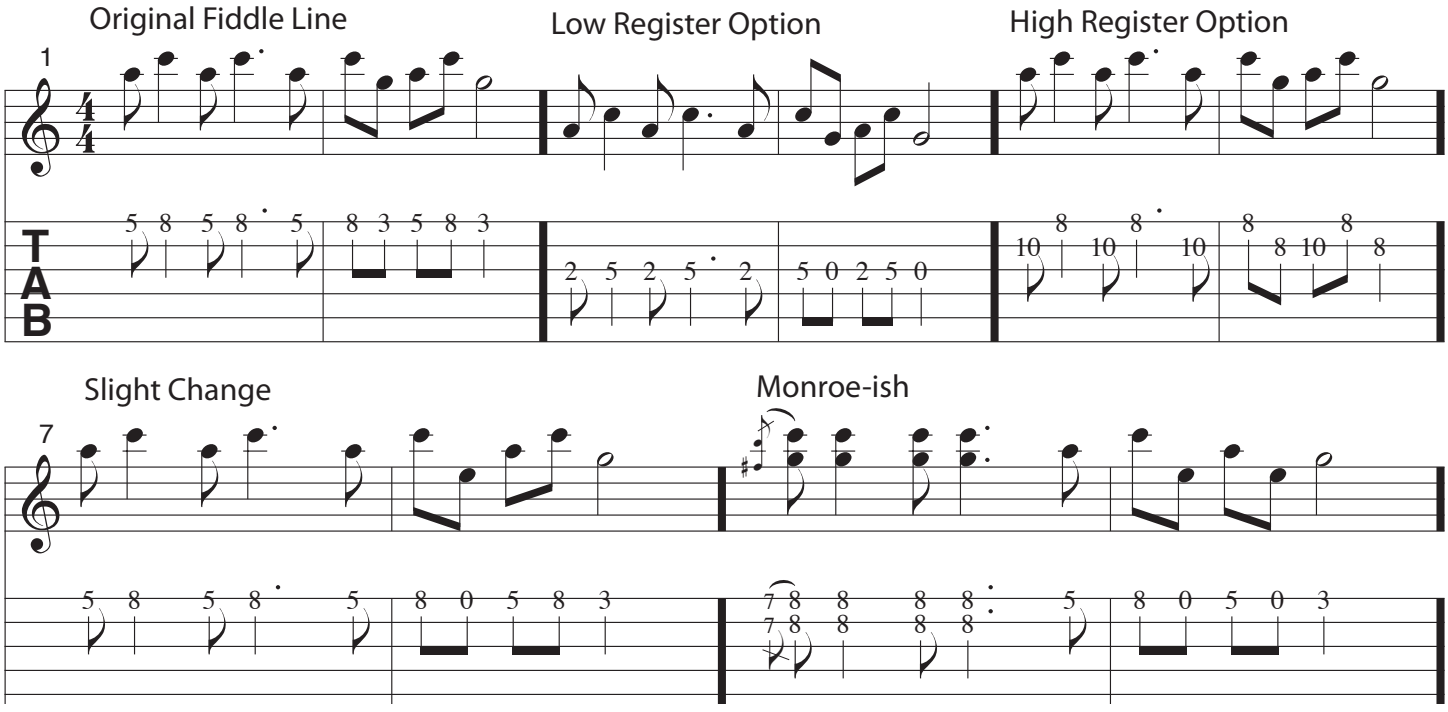
• Going back to the original fingering and changing one note to an open note (see "slight change" below), the one impossible move for me is solved, and I get to keep the articulation! The open note is on the offbeat, and it is in the chord, so it doesn't stick out. Works for me.

• That use of an open string on the offbeat is a technique that was used freely by Monroe. It gives the sense of the musical line with an exciting rhythmic sense and makes the fingering easier. Another Monrovian technique was to use the rhythmic essence of the melody instead of the exact fiddle notes (check out his break to "Turkey in the Straw" for example). The "Monroe-ish" example uses both of these ideas for this first phrase of "Ashland Breakdown."

Part 2 feels like it could have been written for guitar, as it falls easily under the fingers in standard guitar pathways.

Part 3 is very compact. You should be holding a C chord most of the time you are playing the runs; the first finger only leaves the 2nd string to get the slide to D at the end of the tune. You can use pull-offs from the 4th string 2nd fret instead of picking those notes if you want to.

This is a fun tune to play, and it has the advantage that it isn't supposed to be played at breakneck speed!



Audio CD
Tracks 18 & 19

Ashland Breakdown

THE O-ZONE

by Orrin Star

East Virginia Blues

I love playing and singing this song. This version makes a fleeting early appearance in one of my instructional DVDs, but it wasn't one of the tunes that I addressed or taught. So when someone emailed a few weeks ago offering to buy a tab of the solo I told him his money was no good here and that I would do it up for my next column.

What we have here is a Blake-inspired arrangement in C. (I sing it in E so I capo on the fourth fret.) Like my favorite Blake solos this one goes way beyond conventional crosspicking and achieves a blend of rhythm and lead from a single guitar. And it does so through extensive use of strums, double-stops, accented notes (and strums) as well as the usual cast of hammer-ons and pull-offs.

(Imagine a "normal" crosspicked first measure for this song: it would likely start with a down-up-down-up-down-up burst across the middle strings. In contrast, our first six notes feature a hammer-on followed by an accented third note, followed by a down-up strum with an accent on the up. This same scenario occurs throughout the arrangement.)

So this is really (like most Blake confections) all about right-hand finesse: being able to effortlessly shift between strums and individual notes and to execute accented notes and strums with power and ease. So pay special attention to all of the strum and accent notations in the tab.

Note that the high E string is open during the F portions of the solo. Technically it's an E major 7; emotionally it sounds darker and more lonesome. But it only works if you keep the strum on that open E very light; if you hit it too loudly it is distracting and ruins the effect.

Lastly, if you own the aforementioned DVD you probably will have noticed that I inject a quick V chord into the first line of all the verses. But that only happen when I sing; the solo is normal.

I was born in East Virginia
North Carolina I did go
There I met a fair young maiden
Her name and age I did not know

Orrin Star (www.orrinstar.com) is an award-winning guitar, banjo & mandolin player based in the Washington, DC area. The 1976 National Flatpicking Champion, he has toured and recorded widely, is the author of Hot Licks for Bluegrass Guitar, and performs mostly solo and duo. He offers private music instruction both in person and online.

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East Virginia Blues

Arranged by Orrin Star

▼ = down strum ▲ = upstrum ✓ = accented note

Go Tell It On The Mountain

by Dix Bruce

Go Tell It on the Mountain

Ah yes, it's time once again to start thinking about the holiday season and to get some songs ready for those inevitable musical gatherings with family and friends! I love playing holiday songs of all types from pop to traditional. I learned "Go Tell It on the Mountain" in the fifth or sixth grade for a school Christmas program. I loved it then and I love it now. "Go Tell It on the Mountain" is a little more lively than a lot of the traditional and more solemn Christmas songs. I've always heard that it comes from the African American tradition and every holiday season I hear a variety of versions on the radio. I hope you'll enjoy playing it.

The solo for "Go Tell It on the Mountain" is arranged in a basic Carter style with some added hammer-ons and a pull-off to spiff it up. The hammer-ons are all from the open fourth string D note to the fretted E note in the C chord. It's a pretty typical move in the Carter style. The pull-off in measure 12 is from the same E to D note and might be a little difficult for some of you. If it gives you trouble, leave it out for now. If you're a beginner or intermediate guitarist with even limited experience playing Carter-style leads, you should be able to play "Go Tell It on the Mountain" by Christmas time --- if you put in some practice time!

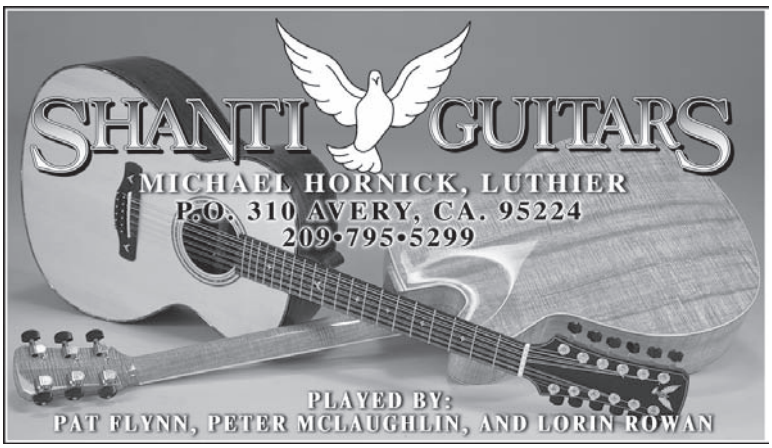
"Go Tell It on the Mountain" is from my book/CD set *Christmas Favorites for Solo Guitar: 30 Best Loved Traditional Songs for Bluegrass Guitar*. The book includes 30 solos, many in the Carter style, others in an "arpeggio strum" chord melody style, plus information on backing up and accommodating singers in different keys, changing songs from 4/4 to 3/4 and vice versa, moving octaves and more.

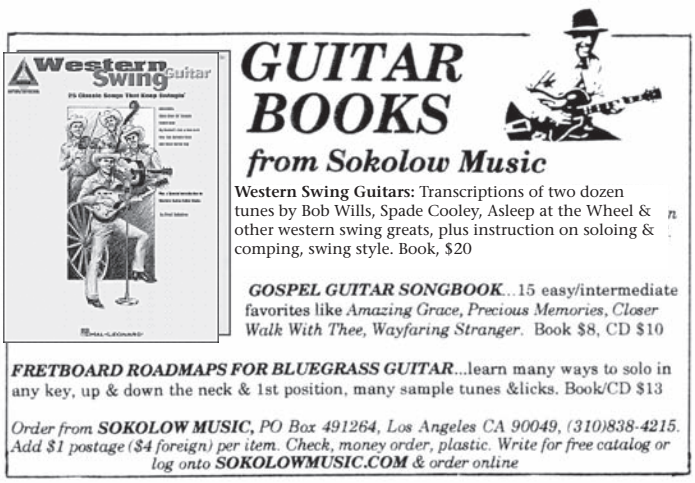
In the solo below you'll see that I included the lyrics to one verse and chorus. To save space they're printed in a small size. My intent was to show the relationship between the solo and the lyric rather than have it serve as a song sheet. You can download a free full-color lyric book from my website (http://musixnow.com/ChristCarterlyricsbooklet.pdf) with the lyrics to "Go Tell It on the Mountain" and all the other 29 songs from my book *Christmas Favorites for Solo Guitar*. It's perfect for sing-alongs and caroling sessions. I guarantee it will come in handy if you work with singers.

I also posted a video of me playing a few other songs from the book ("We Three Kings of Orient Are," "Children Go Where I Send Thee," "Toyland," and "The Friendly Beasts") on YouTube: www.youtube.com/watch?v=MtXBqIlGuro&feature=channel.

I want to explain about the Santa hat in the video. I don't usually go in for those types of things but here's the real story, revealed for the first time ever, anywhere, in the pages of *Flatpicking Guitar Magazine*. The day before I was set to do the taping, I whacked my head on the pull-down stairs that go up into the attic. By the next day I had a pretty good sized goose egg on my forehead. Though it was bright red and in keeping with the season, I decided that viewers might prefer not to look at it as I played Christmas music. Hence the Santa hat. There you have it, the whole truth, the inside story. You're not going to get these kinds of scoops from any other magazine in the world. All hail *Flatpicking Guitar Magazine*!

Dix's books, CDs, and DVDs including Christmas Favorites for Solo Guitar, BackUP TRAX: Basic Blues Guitar, The Parking Lot Picker's Songbooks, and Gypsy Swing & Hot Club Rhythm, Vol. 1 & 2, are all available on his website (www.musixnow.com).

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Go Tell It On The Mountain

Arranged by Dix Bruce

C
F
C
When I was a seek - er, I sought both night and day, I
5
D7
G7
asked the Lord to help me, and He showed me the way.
9
C
G7
C
Go tell it on the moun - tain, Over the hills and ev - ery - where,
13
G7
C
Go tell it on the moun - tain, That Je - sus Christ is born.

Arrangement © 2009 by Dix Bruce

Flatpick Profile: Jeremy Fritts

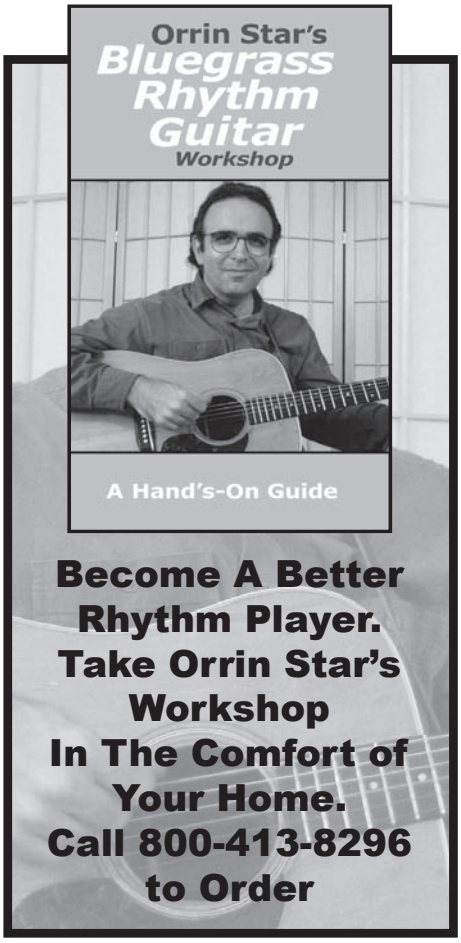
by Dan Miller

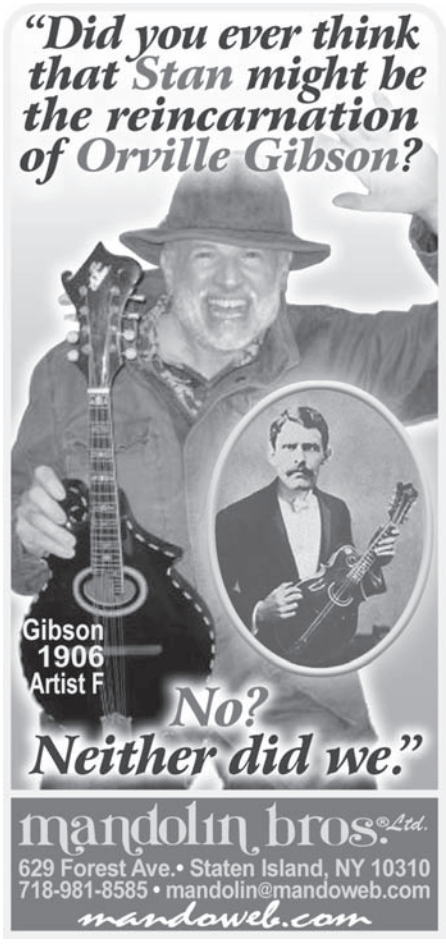
Jeremy Fritts is one of those flatpickers who was born into bluegrass. Jeremy's father, Larry Fritts, played in eastern Tennessee bluegrass bands since before Jeremy was born. His father also owned a music store in Rogersville, Tennessee, that catered to bluegrass musicians. His dad played the banjo, guitar, bass, and the mandolin. His older brother played the bass, banjo, and guitar. Jeremy recalls, "My strongest memories of being a little kid are from that music store. I would hang out with my dad and older brother and all of these people would come in and play music. I was surrounded by it as far back as I can remember."

Although Jeremy has always been surrounded by bluegrass, he has not been content in his own exploration of the guitar to stick with flatpicking or bluegrass. He has been motivated to seek out and absorb as much information about guitar playing and guitar music as he could find, and continues to do so today. Not only has he earned a Master's Degree in classical guitar (from Belmont University in Nashville), he continually studies the music of guitarists who capture his ear. A list of his influences include a very wide range from bluegrass players like Tony Rice, David Grier, Tim Stafford, Kenny Smith, Scott Nygaard, and Bryan Sutton to jazz players like Martin Taylor and Wes Montgomery, classical players like Jullian Bream and Sharon Isbin, and Gypsy players like Django Reinhardt and Bireli Lagrene.

Jeremy started playing the guitar in 1986 at the age of nine. His interest in the guitar was sparked by a sunburst Epiphone guitar that was hanging in his father's music store. When he saw that guitar, he asked his dad if he could have it. His father told him, "You can have it, but if you don't play it everyday I'll put it back up on the wall." When asked what attracted him to the guitar versus the other instruments that he had been exposed to, Jeremy said, "I was mostly around guitar players. Although my dad played banjo in his band, he was usually playing the guitar around the store and at home." Jeremy's father was his first teacher, teaching him how to play rhythm and lead at the same time.

Once Jeremy started learning how to play the guitar, his father didn't waste any time bringing Jeremy into his band. "Within a month after starting to learn how to play my dad was bringing me up on stage and I quickly became the guitar player for his group," Jeremy recalls. In no time Jeremy was playing both lead and rhythm with the band. "Dad taught me how to play lead fast based on sparseness of notes." When asked about the pressure of playing up on stage





so quickly after starting the guitar, Jeremy said, "It was good for me. It put me on the spot and I had to perform. Plus, I was only nine, so I didn't think much about people watching me. It was all fun."

As the Fritts kids got older Larry's band changed from a hometown bluegrass band to a family bluegrass band with Larry on banjo, oldest son Geoffrey on bass, Jeremy on guitar, youngest son Josh on mandolin and guitar, and daughter Sarah on fiddle. The family had a regular spot on the Blue Ridge Drifters weekly radio program and performed at local venues and festivals. Eventually the band got so busy that Larry didn't have enough time to run a music store and a band, so in the early 1990s he closed the store in order to focus on the band. Regarding the band's music, Jeremy said, "Dad has a wide range of musical interests. However, when we started the band it was very traditional bluegrass and traditional country. Dad loved the Carter Family. Over the years things changed. We were eventually playing some swing and jazz and some newgrass. We even featured a medley of a Bach prelude with a Merle Haggard tune!"

When asked about his early influences on the guitar, Jeremy said, "Dad was the biggest influence. The other person I listened to when I was younger was Larry Sparks. I spent a huge amount of time learning Larry Sparks solos. When I was on stage or in the studio recording I used to think, 'What would Larry Sparks do?' Larry's playing always had an edge and a lot of feeling. He is a very tasteful player who might play three notes where others would play 15. He plays fewer notes, but they are powerful. I also liked the bluesy aspect of Larry's playing." From the very start Jeremy learned everything by ear and spent hours jamming at his father's store. He said, "On Saturday we would play the radio show in the morning and then go jam at the store all day long, then play a show at night."

When it was time for Jeremy to go to college, he selected East Tennessee State University (ETSU) because he knew that along with getting his graphic design degree he could also take advantage of the classes offered in the bluegrass music program. While he was there he took lessons from Tim Stafford. One day Tim handed Jeremy a tape of Django Reinhardt. "That changed everything for me," Jeremy said. "That tape encouraged me to study jazz." Another event while he was at school introduced him to classical guitar. Jeremy remembers, "I was sitting on bench at school one day playing my guitar. A professor in the music department heard me play and said, "I want you to hear something." He brought over a classical nylon string guitar. After hearing him play, I started getting into that as well. Those were the most stylistically significant days in my life."

When asked about having Jeremy as a student at ETSU, Tim Stafford said, "Jeremy Fritts is a great guy and has always been a powerful guitar player. When I taught him guitar back in the '90s at ETSU, he was already an advanced player but was a quick learner and a true sponge, ready and willing to soak up everything new that I brought in, whether it was a tune of mine or a Django piece. His approach is unique and I'm sure he's made an ideal teacher with his great attitude and wide-ranging interests."

Jeremy Fritts

After graduating from ETSU Jeremy started teaching in the school's bluegrass guitar program and also taught jazz, classical, and Christian contemporary guitar at Milligan College. Just a short while later (in 2000) he entered the Master's degree program at Belmont University in Nashville. He studied the classical guitar and earned a degree in guitar pedagogy (teaching), graduating from that program in 2002. When asked if he had entered the program at Belmont so that he could earn the credentials that would allow him to seek a teaching job after graduation, Jeremy said, "I went to Belmont with no plan other than to learn at much as I could about the guitar. I wasn't there to seek a job after graduation, I was just after the knowledge. I love learning about music."

Just three months after completing the Master's program, Jeremy decided to follow in his father's footsteps and open a music store to cater to bluegrass and acoustic musicians. Today, Jeremy still owns and operates East Tennessee Musician's Supply in Surgoinsville, Tennessee. In addition to selling instruments, picks, capos, strings, tuners, instructional DVDs, books, and CDs, Jeremy teaches lessons at the store and has authored a series of instructional books for the guitar that he calls *The Jeremy Fritts Guitar Method*.

Jeremy described the course work at Belmont as "very intense" and so he took time off from the family band while he was living in Nashville. The band continued with his brother Josh filling the guitar spot. After Jeremy's return the band got very busy. In 2006 they recorded a new CD, One More Mountain. That album ended up being their best-selling and best-charting recording. By 2008, though, Larry, the band's driving force, developed some health issues that led to the band slowing down the performance schedule. Today Jeremy is mainly focused on teaching and running the store.

Although teaching lessons and running a store occupies most of Jeremy's time and attention, his desire to learn, record, and teach at the college level has continued. Since graduating from Belmont he enrolled at the University of Tennessee and took a semester to study composition and orchestration and work on writing original classical music. Last year he recorded a CD of fingerstyle classical pieces. He has also produced four instructional books and DVDs for bluegrass guitar and this fall he started teaching at ETSU in the bluegrass music program.

All the way up through high school, Jeremy learned music by ear and did not have much interest in music theory. When he was studying at ETSU Tim Stafford introduced him to scales and he took some music theory classes. The classes really sparked an interest in music theory and he started reading every music theory book that he could find. He said, "I became very

interested in music theory because once I knew a bit of theory, analyzing song arrangements was like trying to figure out a puzzle. I would take someone's arrangement and ask, 'Why is he doing this?' or 'What was his thought process?' I would break arrangements apart and look for patterns. Every player has some system, some thing in their solos that repeats itself. Knowing theory helped me learn to analyze song arrangements and learn elements of other player's styles."

When teaching his own students, Jeremy's number one goal is to make the lessons fun and enjoyable. He starts by teaching simple tunes like "Amazing Grace" with a simple melody, based on quarter-note down-stroke picking, and basic chord changes. After a student has studied for three to six months and has built a number of tunes into their repertoire, Jeremy then begins to introduce music theory. He starts by teaching scales and chord construction. His goal is to teach them how to analyze the chord progression and melody and discover how the notes relate to the scales and arpeggios that they have learned.

Jeremy said, "I like my students to learn theory through practical example. I'll have them listen to one of my solos and analyze it by first figuring out the chord progression and then, using the chord progression as a guide, figure out what melody notes match the chord tones. Jeremy said, "Once they are able to understand some theory behind a simple solo that they have analyzed, I think that it becomes easier for them to create their own solos." After students have learned how to analyze a solo based on knowledge of music theory, Jeremy has them create arrangements of their own.

Although Jeremy grew up learning by ear, he believes that there is value in learning music theory. He said that so many players feel as though learning by ear and learning by reading and music theory are two totally separate approaches. As if it is either black or white—you either learn by ear or you learn by reading notes and learning theory. He doesn't see it that way. He views music theory as a way of organizing sound so that you can communicate sound to someone else and you can understand how sound is organized to create melody and harmony. He views music theory as the "language of sound" and feels that learning by ear and learning theory are not two distinct approaches to learning, but they fit together. He said, "My composition teacher said that there have been three great advances in music. The first was when someone was able to communicate sound with a written symbol. The second was the ability to record music, and the third was multi-track recording. All three changed the scope of music."

Having himself had the opportunity to play with other people for his entire musical career, Jeremy feels that playing with others is vital to the learning process. In addition to teaching private lessons, he organizes band classes at his store and teaches his students how to interact with other musicians. He said, "When you play with other people you learn how to take risks and you learn that you have to be willing to fall down so that you can then learn how to get back up again."

Jeremy Fritts is a talented player, performer, teacher, writer, and composer who has maintained a strong passion for music his whole life. Even though he has been playing music professionally for over 25 years the light of that passion has not dulled and he is still always eager and willing to learn more. Through his music store, website (www.BluegrassSupply.com), private lessons, and teaching at the University level, Jeremy shares his passion with the world. If you ever have a chance to study with him—no matter what your current ability level—don't pass up the opportunity. My guess is that you will learn quite a bit.

For this issue's audio companion, Jeremy submitted the old fiddle tune standard "Solidier's Joy." However, there is a twist to this arrangement. The arrangement that Jeremy presents is in a DADGAD tuning. DADGAD tuning is very common with Celtic guitar players. If you are wanting to find a way to play an old tune a new way, start turning those tuning pegs and get your guitar into the DADGAD tuning and give Jeremy's arrangement a try. It is a lot of fun!

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Audio CD
Track 26-27

Soldier's Joy

Arranged by Jeremy Fritts

DADGAD Tuning

Soldier's Joy (con't)

Soldier's Joy (con't)

Music Theory:
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by Michel A. Maddux

Diminished Chords and "Let It Snow"

What is this thing called the diminished chord and when and why should I use one?

You will recall that the basic triad in music is the three notes of the major scale that fall on 1-3-5. Remember that in the 8-note major scale the notes are numbered 1 through 8. For the F major scale the notes are F-G-A-Bb-C-D-E-F. So the basic major triad in F is the notes F-A-C, representing 1-3-5 of the scale. The distance between the notes is W-W-H-W-W-W ("W" represents a whole step and "H" a half step). For example, on the fingerboard, the distance between F-G is two frets; between A and Bb is one fret.

The diminished triad is spelled as I-bIII-bV. In the key of F that would be F-Ab-Cb. In practice the guitarist normally plays the diminished 7th chord, which extends the diminished triad to I-bIII-bV-bbVII. Notice that is a double-flatted seventh; the normal dominant seventh already has a flat-seventh, so we flat it again.

If that sounds confusing, think about it this way: the diminished seventh chord is structured with equally spaced minor third intervals. So from I to bIII is a minor third, from bIII to bV is a minor third, and so on.

Exercising your Diminished Capability

See the exercises for the basic forms of the diminished seventh chords. Notice there only three practical fingerings of the diminished seventh. Notice also that the fingering can be moved and repeats the same notes every four frets; this means that in each position the diminished chord could use each of the 4-note names to identify the chord!

For example, the F diminished chord, written as Fdim, but played as F diminished seventh, has the notes F-Ab-Cb (orB), Ebb (or D). It can be identified as an Fdim, an Abdim, a Bdim, or a Ddim because they all have the same notes in each position on the fingerboard, although they are normally named from the note in the bass.

Play the notes in the chord with Ab in the bass; move to B in the bass, then D in the bass, and on up to F. You can hear that it is the same chord with the notes inverted, meaning played in a different order.

Standard Chord Progressions in Swing

Whew! Now let's think about where to use it. A great approach to playing rhythm guitar is to use the bass notes to represent a bass line, similar to the "walking bass" played behind jazz and swing tunes. The diminished chords provide a way to keep the bass line moving while still representing the desired tonality of the chords in the song. We do this by playing a diminished chord in between the major and the next minor chord; in other words, the diminished chord is used as a transition chord. In a previous FGM article we examined the ways to harmonize behind the notes of the scale degree using the chords I-Major7, ii - Minor 7, iii - Minor 7, IV - Major 7, V - Dominant 7, vi - Minor 7, vii - Minor 7 flat 5. In order to transition between the I-Major7 and the ii Minor 7 we can insert a diminished chord and play, for example, FMa7, F#dim, Gmin7, Abdim, Amin7. This provides a smooth bass line and chords that work with the scale modality.

The next exercise uses the diminished to keep the bass line moving while playing rhythm behind the standard fiddle tune "Sally Goodin." Listen to the bass line, and play this with the swing style sock rhythm.

Notice that the diminished chord is used for a transition as the chords are progressing. Emphasize the bass line to hear how the line ascends and descends, and then play it with an arpeggio style right hand to hear the full expression of the notes on a slower song.

About the Tune - Let It Snow

This issue is hitting your mailbox about the time the Christmas season is upon us, so I've selected the great seasonal tune, "Let It Snow." Written in 1945 in Hollywood, California during one of the hottest days on record, Sammy Cahn and Jule Styne never mention Christmas in the lyrics, but it has become a Christmas time favorite. Recorded by artists from Dean Martin and Frank Sinatra to Smoky Robinson, it is fun to play, and uses those pesky diminished chords you've been reading about.

Have fun, and keep on pickin'!

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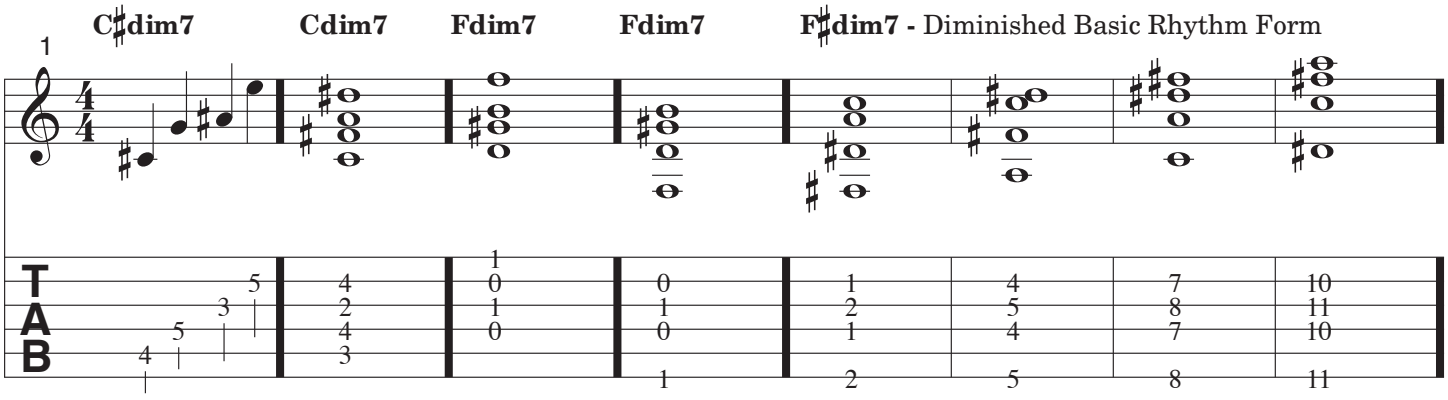
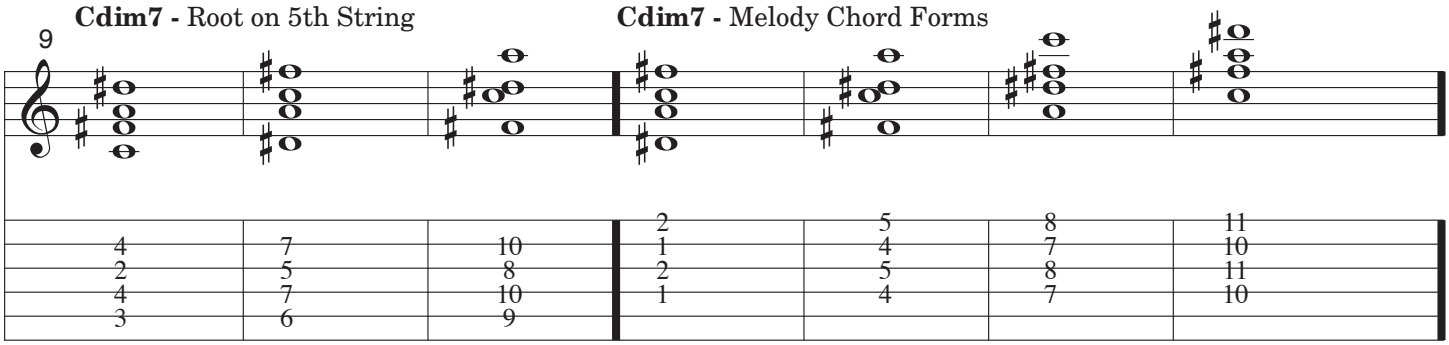
Audio CD
Track 29

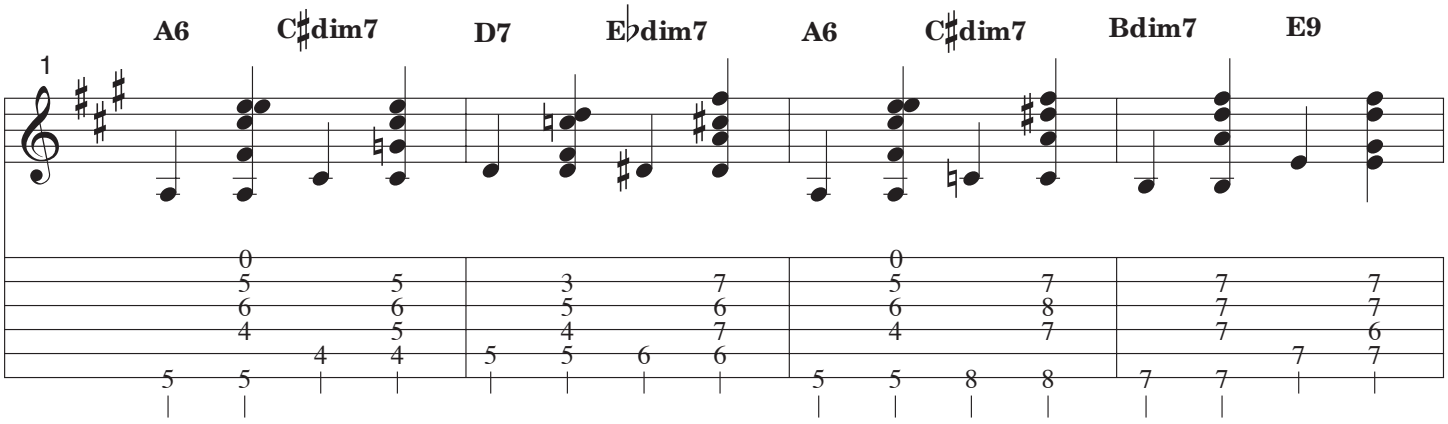
Diminished Chord Exercises

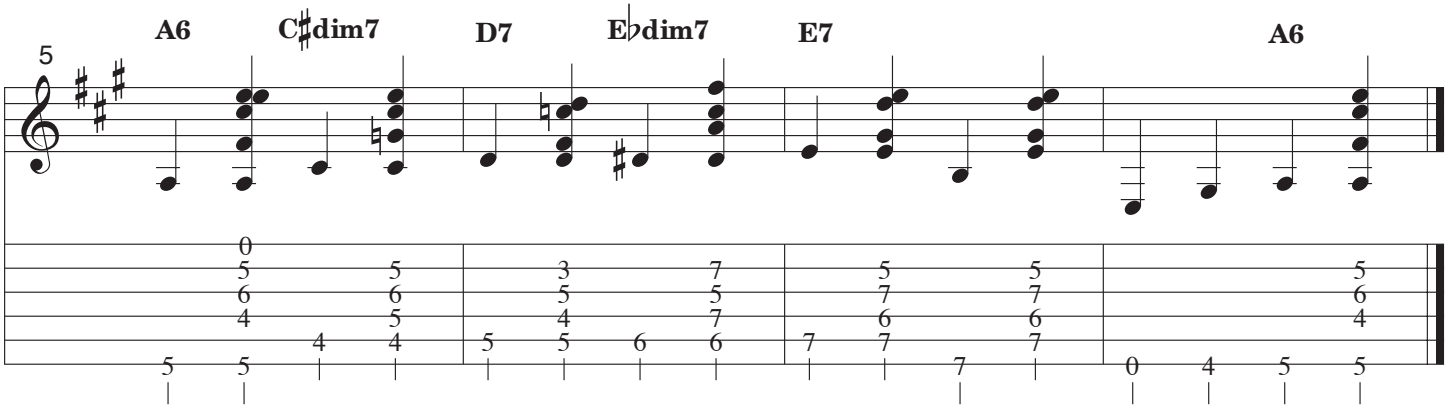
Arranged by Mike Maddux





Sally Goodin' - Texas Style Sock Rhythm Example





Audio CD
Tracks 31 & 32

Let It Snow

Arranged by Mike Maddux

Luthier Visit: Nick Oliver Christchurch, New Zealand

By Chris Thiessen

While in New Zealand earlier this year I attended a concert by Andrew London and his swing group Hot Club Sandwich at the Harbour Lights Theatre in Lyttleton. Great show! Bob Heinz, the rhythm guitarist for the evening, played a Selmer-style petit bouche guitar. It looked great and sounded even better, and during a break I approached Bob and asked about his guitar. Turns out it was the handiwork of Nick Oliver, a local Christchurch luthier. [Author's note: Grande bouche or D-hole models are typically called "Selmer Maccaferris" while the petite bouche or oval-hole guitars are called "Selmers."]

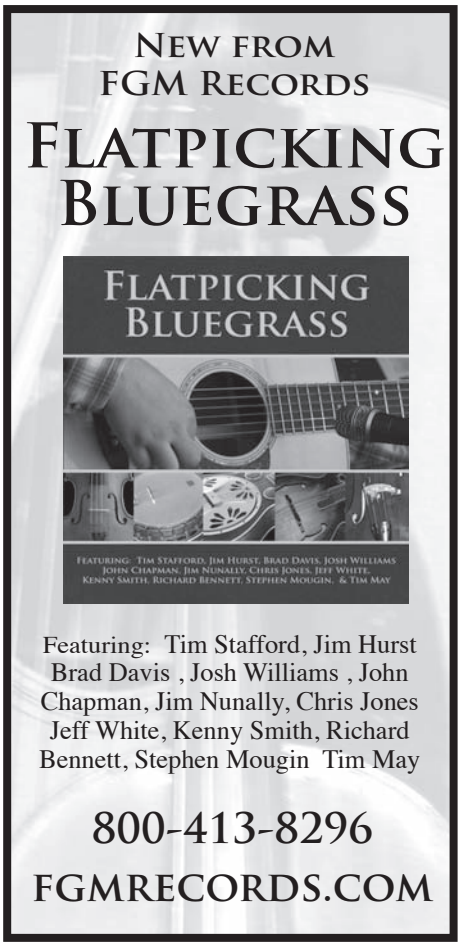
Within a day I had called Nick and arranged to visit his shop. Wolfgang Zdrenka (a Christchurch resident and swing guitarist who I had met at Kaufman's Kamp in 2009) was interested in purchasing a Maccaferri-style guitar, so we drove over to the University of Canterbury campus in Christchurch. Nick has an arrangement with the University that allows him access to some vacant workspace evenings and on the weekends. He's filled that space with equipment, crafting maple, spruce, and Australiasian regional tonewoods into some fine archtop and Maccaferri guitars.

As a fabrication engineer at the University, Nick is responsible for laboriously creating—from designs, minimal sketches, or even photographs—test devices for university chemical researchers. As a luthier, he turns that detailed focus and inventiveness to developing time-saving forms and jigs that increase his productivity and quality. While he still relies on stateside suppliers like LMII and Stew-Mac, Oliver—like many other Kiwi builders—has struck a balance between importing raw materials and inventively processing it to keep costs down.

"I started building electric guitars in the early 90s after reading Ralph Denyer's *The Guitar Handbook*," Nick recalls. "The two or three guitar shops here in New Zealand didn't offer much in the way of customization or even left-handed guitars, so there was an opportunity to start there and do some repair work as well. I did refrets, general repair, built custom necks, and found that I was very good at custom paint jobs and sunbursts, which generated a lot of side business. All that experience built up my 'chops' in repair and construction."

"But in that decade there was not a lot of information on the ground. Over the years, with the various internet groups and the ability of the community of luthiers to interact electronically, there's been an explosion of data. But at first the only thing I had was the Benedetto book [*Making an Archtop Guitar*]; that was my constant source." Nick's first attempt at an archtop resulted in a precisely executed and tastefully understated blonde guitar.

Nick's decision to include Maccaferri-style guitars in his building repertoire was not a whim. "I have always been interested in guitars that are slightly 'different'," Nick explains. "I saw a Selmer many moons ago—I think it was in a rather crackly & scratchy Django Reinhardt video—and was fascinated by the tiny soundhole. So from then on it was always in the back of my head to eventually build one. When I found Collins' book [Michael Collins' *Building a Selmer Maccaferri*], I read it repeatedly, filing the information away until I was ready to build one. After seeing my archtops, Bob Heinz approached me wanting a Selmer petite bouche, so it was an ideal opportunity



Nick Oliver Guitars - The Petite Bouche (l) and Grand Bouche (r)

to carry out my first build and get paid to do it!"

Since that first commission, Nick has since built several petit and grande bouche models, incorporating some Kiwi design elements into the standard model (including a unique "double-back" construction for greater volume). The two pictures above show a grande bouche model (that Wolfgang later purchased) "in the white" and finished (replete with characteristic moustache bridge and a headstock veneer of figured imbuia burl) and a petite bouche model.

When asked about flat-top guitars, Nick grins. "Well, I'm currently building two using flamed California laurel (umbellularia californica) for the sides and back and Adirondack spruce for the top. They're based on the 000-size, but I was so pleased with the volume increase from the double back construction [used in his Maccaferris] that I've included it on these two." After listening to Nick describe in detail the complex triple top radius necessary for Maccaferri construction, I'm confident these flat-tops will be something remarkable as well.

And when he's not building his own guitars, Nick serves as a moderator for the Australian/New Zealand Luthiers Forum (or ANZLF, at www.anzlf.com), doing what he can to "pay-it-forward" for the next generation of luthiers. For more information on Nick's latest creations, check out his website, www.oliver-guitars.com.

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PICKIN' FIDDLE TUNES
by Adam Granger

MELODAE OBSCURA

Hi, you guys. I am herewith issuing you these three tunes. Their mastery is recommended. Like as not, it won't make you a better human being, but it certainly won't make you a worse one. There aren't that many things in life about which that statement can be accurately made, and that alone should be sufficient encouragement to add these to your tune bag.

We've got three tunes from three regions. *Sorenson's Rhinelander* is first. Its provenance is a bit confusing. Ready? Here goes: A rhinelander is a Bavarian circle dance, BUT it's danced essentially like a schottische (or, in Bavaria, a schottesche), BUT it's got a Scandinavian first name BUT it's still being called a rhinelander, BUT rhinelanders also have Danish lineage. . . Oh yeah, and a rhinelander is sometimes called a Bavarian polka.

The upshot is that this is to be played like a schottische: a relaxed, easy tempo and lots of nice staccatto notes at key places. Listen to my recording on the *FGM* companion CD and you'll get the idea. Oh, and note that, since the tune modulates from G to C in the third part, we have to resolve back to our original key, by playing the first part once or twice (once, in our case).

Second is *Reddigan's*, a straight-ahead Irish reel. This is also known as *Larry Reddigan's*, *Abbey*, *Moher* and *The Moher* (after the Cliffs of Moher, in County Clare). It's a fun G reel. If you really want to get legit and if you have the chops, you can insert double-time triplets into the three-note groups in measures three, four and seven of the first part and measures three and seven of the second part. I demonstrate these on the FGM CD but I don't actually use them in my recording of the tune.

READING *EASY-TAB*

Easytab is like conventional tablature, except that timing notation has been streamlined and simplified. Since fiddle tunes are comprised mainly of eighth notes, *Easytab* uses the eighth note as its basic unit. An eighth rest is indicated by a dot. Therefore, a note with a dot after it is a quarter note, and a note with three dots after it is a half note. There are a total of eight notes and rests per measure.

FOR BEGINNERS

Pick with an alternating style: down-up-down-up-down-up etc. The first note of each measure should be a downstroke, the last an upstroke. **Include rests** in this alternating pattern. This keeps you "in sync", playing downstrokes on the beats, so that, no matter what the configuration of notes and rests in an eight-unit measure, the right hand plays them down-up-down-up-down-up-down-up.

And third, we return to North America for a fine French-Canadian reel, *The Jeunes Maries Reel*, a/k/a *The Jeune Marie Reel*. This is the quintessential French-Canadian Reel: very punchy and melodic and fun and easy to play on the guitar. Note that it's in D, capoed two and played out of a C position.

These tunes are all from *Granger's Fiddle Tunes for Guitar*, my collection of fiddle tunes in guitar tablature. This collection is celebrating its 30th birthday. Its genesis was a notebook I kept while in the Powdermilk Biscuit Band in the '70s. We prepared three tunes a week for use on *A Prairie Home Companion*. I was in a quartet with three serious tunesmiths: Bob Douglas, Fiddlin' Mary DuShane and Dick Rees. Among them, these guys know two thousand tunes, maybe more, and I was no slouch in that department myself.

By the time I had accumulated 150 tunes or so I was visualizing an omnibus collection of fiddle tunes in the tradition of *O'Neill's*, *Ryan's* and *Cole's*, but in guitar tablature instead of standard music notation, for us musical illiterates. I began collecting tunes from every pre-Internet source I could: bought and borrowed records, dubbed tapes, field recordings, on-the-spot transcriptions and notation-to-tablature conversions (drawing from the above-mentioned collections and others). I strove to present the tunes in as essential and generic a form as possible, and that is one of the strengths of the collection: the tunes haven't been Grangerized; they await your invention.

My original goal was 1000 tunes, but I screeched to a stop at 500 (actually, 508) for the sake of my mental health. The collection has always been self-published because, while I'm usually a pretty laid-back, nice guy, I can get a tad cantankerous when it comes to my profession and my career.

In thirty years, I have sold about four thousand books, in two editions. I originally offered a partial set of recordings on cassette, then a full set, and now have the series available in CD.

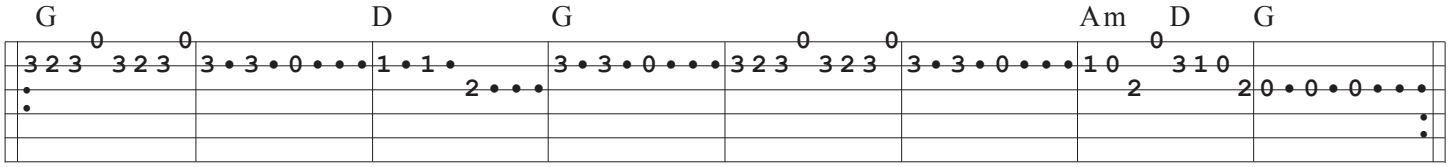
And that, in a tortoiseshell, is the story of *Granger's Fiddle Tunes for Guitar*. Within the next half-lifetime, I'll put out a third edition of the collection (inventory on the second edition is running low). Where the first two editions were hand written, the third edition will be typeset as you see the tablature in this column.

SORENSON'S RHINELANDER

Audio CD Track 34

KEY: G

I



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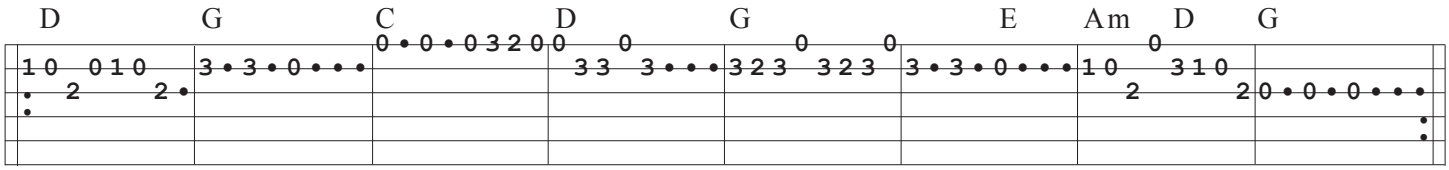

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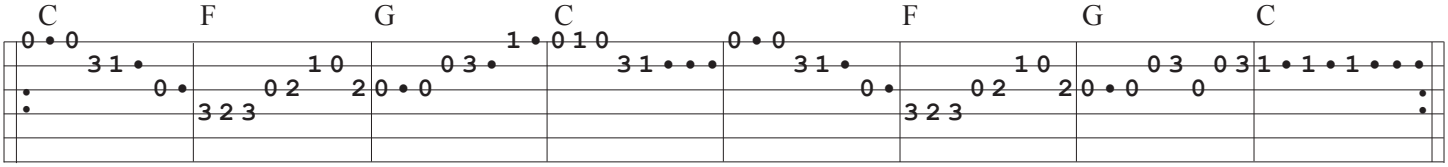
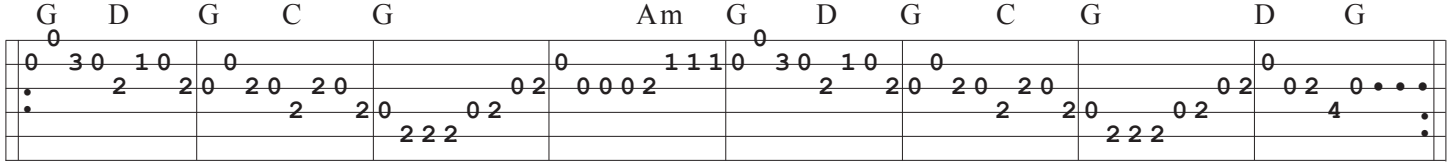


REDDIGAN'S

Audio CD Track 36

KEY: G

I



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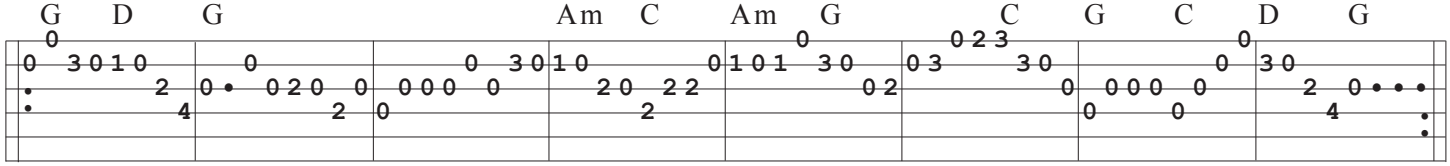
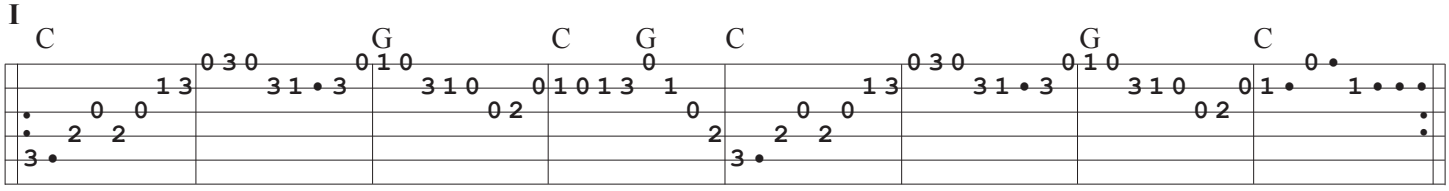


JEUNES MARIES REEL

Audio CD Track 37

KEY: D (2)

I



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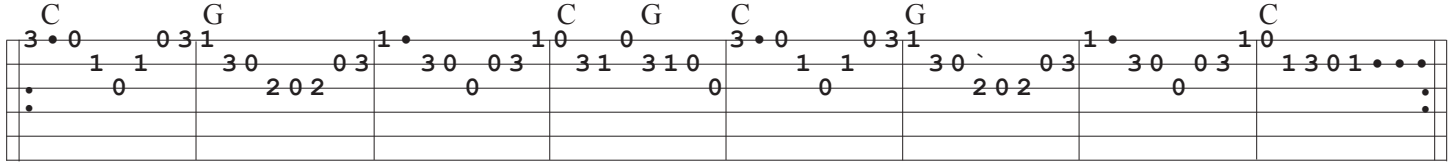

Adam's first wife was from Rhinelander, Wisconsin. Her mother was from Kalamazoo, Michigan. In the late thirties, when she was about fifteen, her family would sometimes board members of big bands who were appearing in town. Once, they boarded a couple of members of Glenn Miller's band, one of whom was a songwriter. A couple of months later, she received a package containing a phonograph record and a note which read, "Dear Ruth, You were the inspiration for this number." The song was I've Got a Gal in Kalamazoo.

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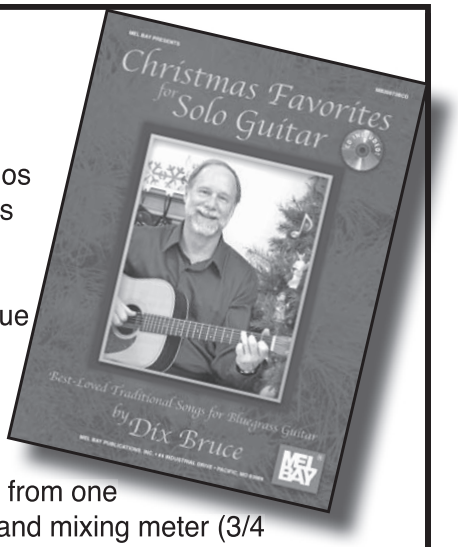

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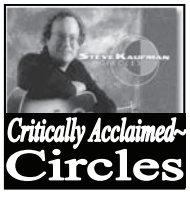

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Morning Carol

Written by Bill Bay

6 = D

Moderately, with expression

Morning Carol (con't)

John McGann's Eclectic Acoustic

Limehouse Blues: Part 2

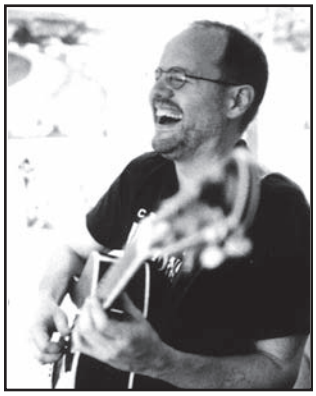
"Limehouse Blues" is a great swing tune that I first heard adopted to a string band setting on a live recording of the David Grisman Quintet, late 70s, with Andy Statman sitting in on mandolin. This 30s-era tune is often found in jazz fake books in Ab, but Django recorded it in G, and since that's the flatpicker's favorite key, it's good enough for me! This tune is becoming a common crossover tune for bluegrass guitarists interested in swing music.

In this second installment, I'd like to extend last month's introduction by offering a variety of "comping" (jazz lingo for "sympathetic accompaniment") positions. By playing on the lower strings, we get strong, supportive sounds that get across the basic information without a lot of frills or intrusion on the soloist's territory. If you play four attacks per measure in the classic Freddie Green (Count Basie) or Django style, you will be setting a great foundation for a swinging jam.

Of course, there is a very specific set of sub-styles for swing guitar, with a variety of approaches to the right and left hands, to which some players devote their entire lives. A great resource for Gypsy Jazz style rhythm is Michael Horowitz's *Gypsy Rhythm* (djangobooks.com).

Compare and contrast the basic chord symbols on the first staff with the suggested voicings written below. You'll find voicings that use notes other than the roots in the bass, known as "chord inversions". For example, the A/C# indicates an A chord with C# in the bass. These inversions really make a big difference in the sound of the music, and is one of the differences between straight bluegrass, which uses mostly root position (root of the chord in the bass) chords, and swing, which tends toward more "forward motion" in the harmony, which can often be seen as a moving bass line which is harmonized with chords. Read that last sentence slowly and carefully, then play through the examples, and you'll see how Texas style backup on fiddle tunes differs from bluegrass, without much change to the basic harmony. There is a lot more to it than just open-position chords (with open strings) in bluegrass versus closed position in swing; each is a wonderfully distinct variety of sounds and approaches.

John McGann (www.johnmcgann.com) is a Professor at Berklee College of Music, and among other duties is leading a Bluegrass Guitar Lab, Django Guitar Lab, Gypsy Jazz Ensemble, and Celtic Music Ensemble. John is a founding member of many groups including The Wayfaring Strangers, The Boston Edge, and Celtic Fiddle Festival. His instructional DVDs Rhythm Tune Up and Rhythm Mandolin and his books Sound Fundamentals and Developing Melodic Variations on Fiddle Tunes are receiving great accolades. Grove Lane, his duo CD with Irish accordion master Joe Derrane, has just been released on Compass Records. You can check out his custom transcription service, in which you can have any music of your choice notated, at the above web address. Drop by the website for lots of great free technique tips for flatpickers.



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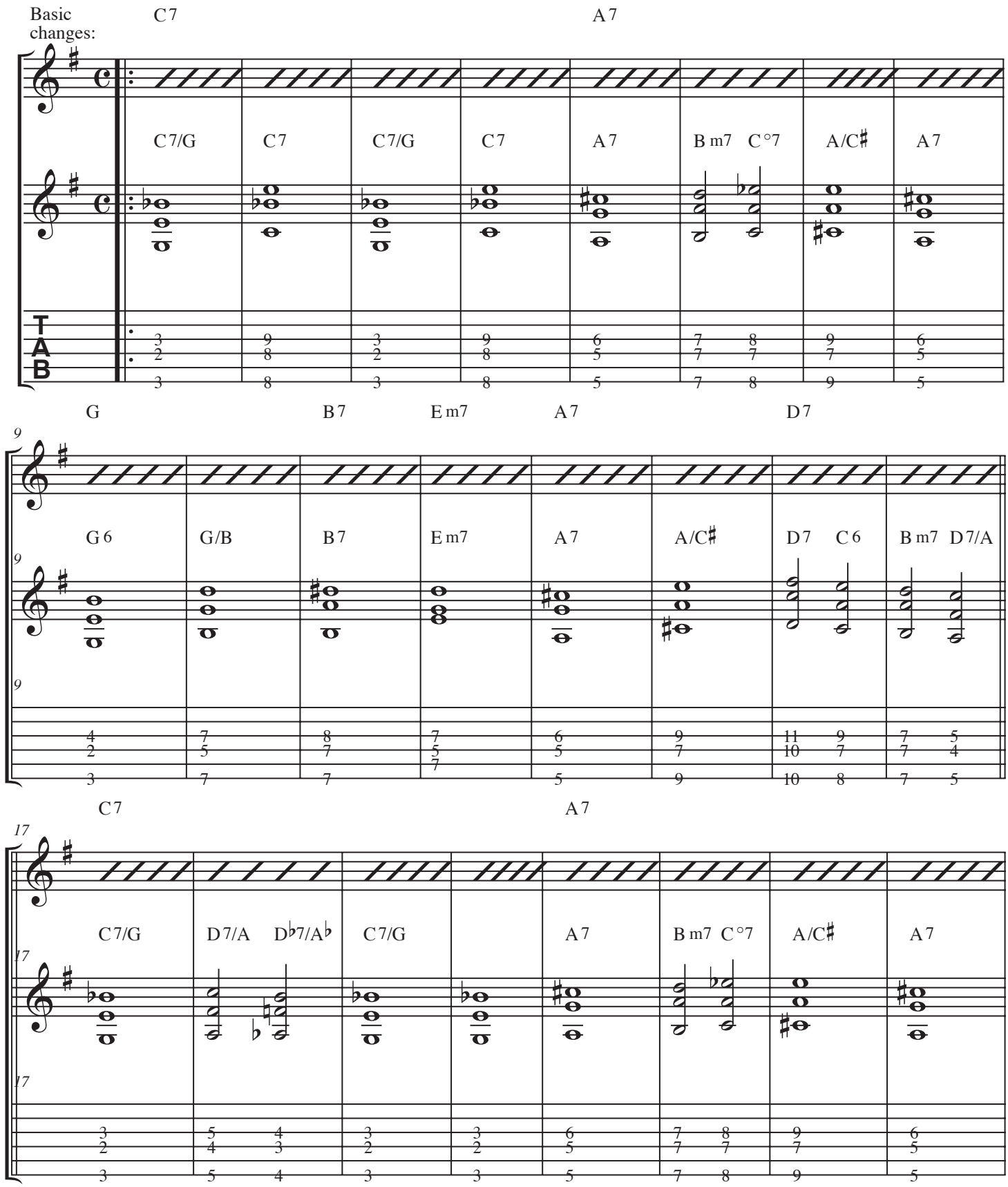
Limehouse Blues

Arranged by John McGann



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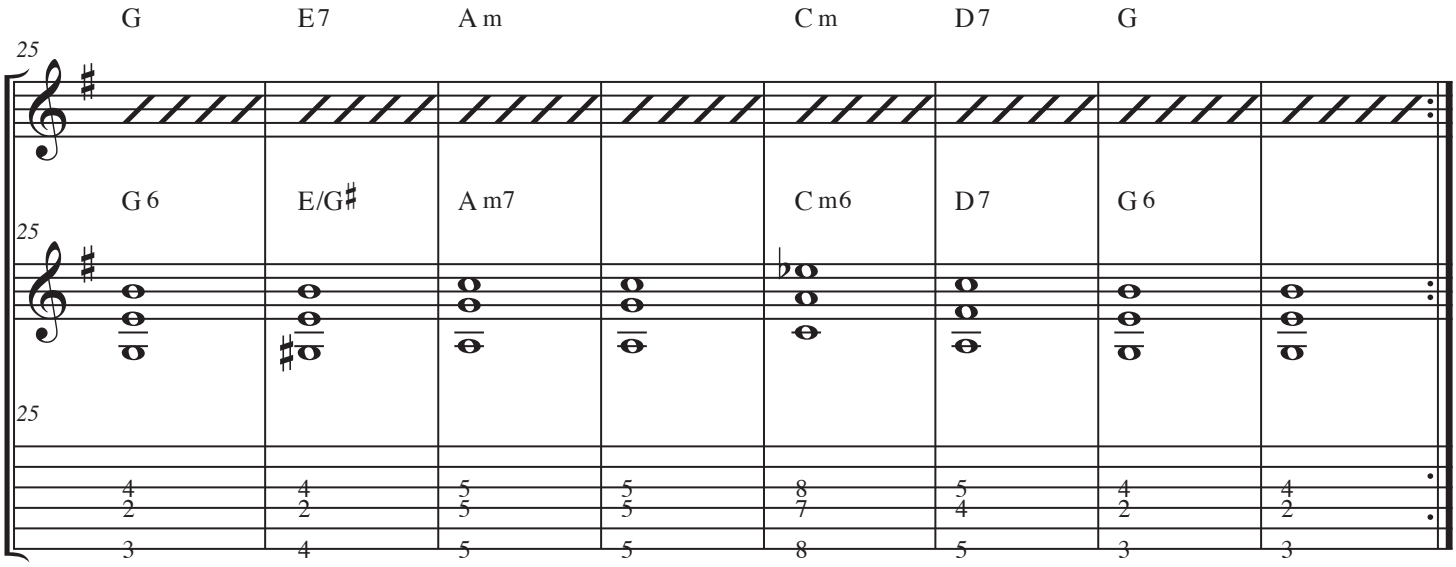
Limehouse Blues (con't)



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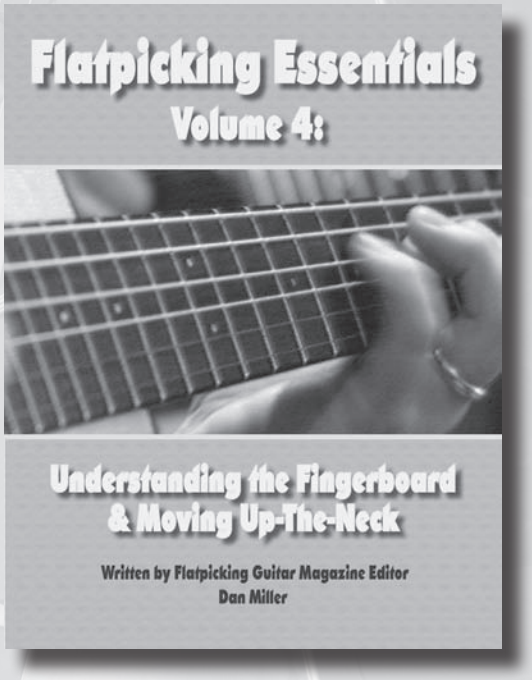

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Eric Lambert: *Doin' Alright*

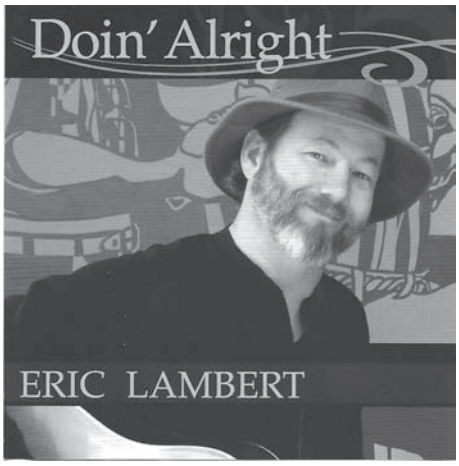
by Dan Miller

I am always amazed when I interview flatpickers who have spent the majority of their early years playing rock and roll and blues music on the electric guitar and then later in life fall in love with the acoustic guitar and flatpicking to such a degree that they give up the electric gigs and focus completely on their flatpicking. It is not an uncommon occurrence and this issue's "CD Highlight" artist is another player who fits that profile. Eric Lambert has been a professional musician all his adult life and for 25 years played in rock, blues, and country bands—at times touring with fairly successful groups. For many of those years he was a "closet acoustic player." Several years ago he had a "burning desire" to see if he could make a living playing acoustic music and he "put the electric guitars away." He is now a member of the Chicago-based band The Hen House Prowlers and is out flatpicking bluegrass music 200 nights a year!

A Chicago native, Eric Lambert started playing the guitar in 1970 when he was 13 years old. He said, "My dad was injured at the steel mill and someone gave him a Harmony acoustic guitar as a gift so that he would have something to do while he was recovering. He never took to it, but I did." Watching Glen Campbell's show on television was one of the things that sparked Eric's interest.

Eric started learning the guitar by picking up songs that he heard on pop radio. He said, "I think that the first song that I learned how to play was a Tommy James and the Shondells tune called 'I Think We're Alone Now.'" Eric would listen to the song on the radio and then try to pick out the melody on his guitar by playing a single note style solo. He also spent time learning material from a Mel Bay book that had come with the guitar.

When Eric was 14 his family moved to a new neighborhood and Eric met a friend who "was a good guitar player." That new friend, Mike Perpich, became Eric's guitar mentor and taught him how to play top 40 songs by bands like the Guess Who, Creedence Clearwater Revival, and Steppenwolf. Mike also invited Eric to join his band. Throughout his high school years Eric played in several bands and continued



to explore FM "guitar centered" rock and roll music. The bands played at school dances, street parties, basement parties, and "anywhere else that someone would let us set up."

Regarding his teenage years, Eric said, "I was learning how to play a lot of the pop rock music. However, it wasn't until I discovered the Allman Brothers that I really got serious about the guitar. I feel like the Allman Brothers music really made a guitar player out of me. To me their music was new and different. The blues-based music and the twin guitars of Duane Allman and Dickey Betts got my attention. I also wore the grooves off Santana records."

In 1975 Eric left home to go to college at Western Illinois University and "discovered music all over the place." He said, "When I was at home I knew just a handful of musicians. When I went to college I found them everywhere on campus." He teamed up with a guitar playing friend, Dan Cutaia, and the two of them continue to explore the Allman Brothers, wore out the Eagle's *Hotel California* album, and starting listening to and learning jazz. He said, "Dan and I learned a lot of guitar together."

When asked about his major in college, Eric said, "My announced major was accounting, but I actually majored in playing in a band. We first played everywhere we could find on campus and then we started traveling to joints around Illinois and Iowa. In 1977 Eric left college to play music full-time with the rock band Flavor. He stayed with that band for about a year and then joined up with a southern rock band called Virgil Kane. Eric said, "We played tunes by Allman Brothers, Charlie Daniels, Marshall Tucker, and Stillwater." Eric toured with that band for two years. During the time he was with Virgil Kane he also started to get interested in playing the acoustic guitar and became a "closet flatpicker." He said, "I heard the Will The Circle Be Unbroken album and it turned me on to a whole new genre of music. It inspired me to play more acoustic guitar and start messing around with songs like 'Black Mountain Rag.'" In 1980 he subscribed to *Frets Magazine*.

After two years on the road with Virgil Kane, Eric moved back to Chicago and "continued in the direction of the Allman Brothers" with the band Free Flight. His time with that band was spent, "writing songs, recording, growing and developing." The other guitar player in the band, Gene Liccardi, joined Free Flight after playing years on the country music circuit and had mastered the art of country guitar. Eric said, "I learned a lot from him."

After Free Flight ran its course Eric's interest in country music led him to join the Hazzard County Band. Eric describes the Indiana-based band as, "a hot country band with a great steel player." The band played mostly in clubs in Hammond, Indiana, a place that Eric refers to as "a country music hub that revolves around beer joints." Eric spent a couple of years playing country music in those beer joints five nights a week.

During the 1980 and early 1990s Eric also toured with two other noteworthy bands, Big Shoulders and Heartsfield. Big Shoulders was a Chicago-based blues-influenced rock band, known for their bawdy renditions of popular folk tunes. The band recorded with Rounder Records and played many big blues festivals. Regarding his work with the band, Eric said, "It was a humbling experience. After I played my first show with the band we listened to a tape of the show and it wasn't good. I was given 'four nights to get better.' I got some tapes of Elmore James, Sonny Boy Williamson, and T-Bone Walker and went to the wood shed. With those guys I couldn't just play block pentatonic scales. I had to learn about adding vocal quality phrasing to my solos, playing on the back of the beat, and locking in with the bass player. I learned a lot with

that band." The band's leader and keyboard player, Ken Saydak, had toured with Johnny Winter in the early 80s and had played on Winter's 1984 release *Guitar Slinger*.

The other band of note that Eric toured with was Heartsfield, who Eric describes as a 'cross between the Eagles and the Outlaws." That band was formed in 1970 by J. C. Heartsfield and Perry Jordan and toured throughout the United States in the 1970s and 1980s (the band reunited in 1999 and are still active today). Eric said, "They were a band that I had admired when I was younger." When Eric was with the band there where seven band members, four of them on guitar. In addition to playing electric guitar, Eric also played acoustic guitar, banjo, and mandolin with the band. He also started performing as a solo act on acoustic guitar at pubs during his off nights.

Although his main gig during the late 1980s and early 1990s was rock and roll, on the nights that Eric wasn't out playing with the band he started play acoustic music either as a solo or a two-guitar duo. He said, "I had started to develop some acoustic technique and I would go out and play Grateful Dead and folky music a few nights a week. I was at a point in my career that I really wanted to play acoustic full time, but I didn't know how to make a living at it." Eric also started playing in a duo with a fiddle player who played old-time tunes.

When asked what made him want to play acoustic music after playing for so long in rock, blues, and country bands, Eric said, "It was the pure acoustic sound that attracted me. The sound of an acoustic instrument is pure and beautiful and it went right through me. It was also a challenge. I got to the point where I could play electric rock, country, and blues in my sleep, but at first I couldn't play this acoustic stuff. I listened to Tony Rice, Sam Bush, Bela Fleck, Jerry Douglas, and Vassar Clements and it was all out of reach for me. I was inspired to work hard to learn how to play like that."

In addition to playing acoustic music, both as a solo act and in duos, Eric went on the road with Valerie Smith & Liberty Pike for one year, around 2008. He then returned to the Chicago area and continued playing solo in folk music venues, performing original music and picking fiddle tunes. A little over a year ago he got a call from The Henhouse Prowlers asking if he was interested in joining the band. Eric said, "At first I was hesitant because I was having fun playing solo." However, after seeing the band play he decided that he would accept their offer.

The Hen House Prowlers are busy about 200 nights a year. Eric said, "We have success with a traditional audience as well as the Colorado-style hippie audience." The band won the Rockygrass Band Competition in 2010 and won a Chicago Music Award for the best Country/Western Entertainer of the Year. The band will be releasing a new record this winter and is scheduled to appear at the Folk Alliance Conference and at Wintergrass in early 2011. They are also

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Eric Lambert

getting ready for their first European tour. Eric said, "I am finally doing what I have wanted to do for a long time."

Since Eric spent so much time playing the electric guitar, I ask him what particular challenges he faced when he started playing the acoustic guitar in the flatpick style. He said, "It was like learning the guitar all over again. The right hand was a real challenge… getting a clear tone. It was hard to develop good note clarity and speed at the same time. I had to start working with a metronome and learn about repetition and muscle memory. It took some discipline. The group that I'm in now likes to play really fast and getting good tone on the acoustic guitar when you are playing at high tempos takes some work, especially since I'm in an ensemble where it is easy to hear every instrument except mine! With the acoustic guitar you can't just step on a pedal or get closer to the amp to hear yourself better."

Another aspect of playing in a bluegrass band, as opposed to a rock or blues band, was the timing of the music. Eric said, "Bluegrass is a 'front of the beat' music,' not a 'back of the beat' music. If you asked any rock or blues player to play along with a Jimmy Martin album it would be a real eye opener for them!" Eric added, "Using a capo was a new experience for me as well. When I first tried to learn how to play 'Black Mountain Rag' I didn't know about using a capo, so I was trying to play it out of an open A position."

Eric's solo record *Doin' Alright* is a very nice acoustic guitar recording. It is not your typical bluegrass or flatpicking CD, and that is refreshing. Eric has a lot of guitar experience and has been influenced by a lot of guitarists over the years. Since he has spent so much time playing solo shows he said that he tried to write and arrange the songs that are on the recording from a solo performance point of view. He said, "The material on the CD is reflective of my solo show." Eric recorded the CD himself and played the guitar, mandolin, and bass. He brought in Dave Nelson to play the Dobro® and Tim Dishman played bass on one tune.

The CD presents a good mix of acoustic guitar music. There are a couple of songs with a Celtic feel, a couple of vocal tunes, a few really nice guitar solo and duet numbers that have a Windham Hill vibe, and a few bluegrass and fiddle tune style songs. It is a very nice representation of the versatility of the acoustic guitar and a CD that I recommend to anyone who is a fan of acoustic guitar music.

On this issue's audio CD companion we present the only tune from the recording that is a traditional fiddle tune offering. This one is a medley of "Red Haired Boy" and "Gold Rush" that Eric has titled "Red Haired 12" because he plays the song on a 12-string guitar. We have provided a transcription of Eric's solos starting on the next page. Overall, I found this CD to be very easy to listen to and very captivating since Eric draws from his vast guitar experience. It is always interesting to listen to a guitar player that is adept at many guitar styles bring them all together on an acoustic recording like this. As a result you will hear acoustic guitar music that you will not find on a typical flatpicking CD. A great place to find new guitar ideas! You can purchase Eric's CD at cdbaby.com.

When Eric is not on the road with the Hen House Prowlers he loves to teach guitar lessons. Monday through Wednesday he can be found teaching group lessons during the day at the Leon Lynch Learning Center for Union Steel Workers in East Chicago, Indiana. On Tuesday evenings he teaches flatpicking at Down Home Guitars in Frankfort, Illinois. He also teaches group and private lessons at his home studio in Lowell, Indiana. Currently he is teaching a teen rock and roll class and an adult acoustic rock class at his home studio.

For the past two or three years Eric has been playing a 1996 Collings D2 guitar that he bought from Allen Shadd. He also has a Martin M-38 that he bought in 1982 and a Bourgeois Country Boy that he bought from Kit Simon at the Old Town Pickin' Parlor in Arvada, Colorado. He said, "I use the Collings 100% of the time in our live shows. I've played that Collings in eight countries and it's all beat up, but I love it to death. I use a K & K pickup and a Fishman Aura. I also mic the guitar."

Eric Lambert has been a professional guitar player nearly his entire life. He has played in rock bands, blues bands, country bands, southern rock bands, and bluegrass bands. His focus on bluegrass music these days is definitely bluegrass' gain. He is a new and welcome voice in the bluegrass guitar world. If you get a chance to see him play with The Hen House Prowlers, don't miss it. And check the website www.reverbnation.com/henhouseprowlers for news of their new CD.

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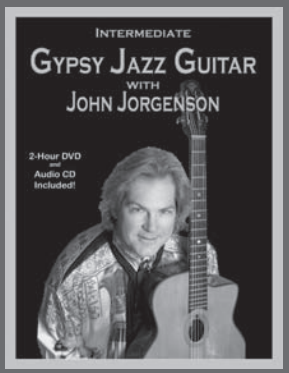

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Red Haired 12

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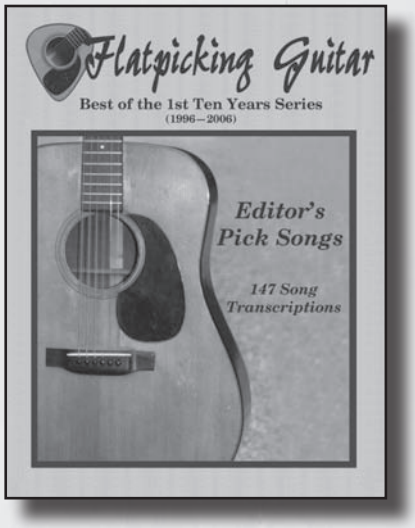

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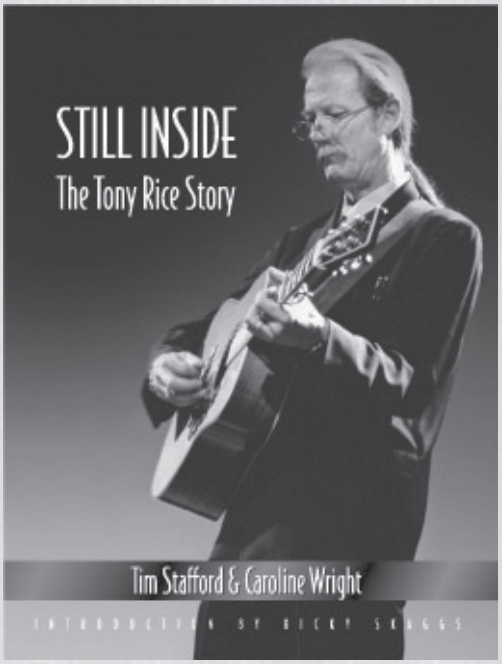
Now Available! Two New Biographical Books covering flatpicking guitar's two most influential performers: Tony Rice and Doc Watson!

Still Inside:
The Tony Rice Story
by Tim Stafford & Caroline Wright



A decade in the making, Still Inside: The Tony Rice Story delivers Tony's tale in his own inimitable words, and in anecdotes and observations from his friends, family, fans, and fellow musicians.

Tony's long road has taken him from coast to coast and around the world, through historic recordings and appearances that often profoundly move those who experience them. More than 100 people were interviewed for this book, sharing memories of Tony and discussing his indelible impact on their own music. Alison Krauss, J.D. Crowe, Sam Bush, Béla Fleck, Jerry Douglas, Ricky Skaggs, David Grisman, Emmylou Harris, Linda Ronstadt, Peter Rowan, and many others contribute intimate stories and frank observations of this private, enigmatic man.

In the book's final chapter, co-author Tim Stafford—a highly respected acoustic guitarist in his own right—provides insight into Tony's technique, timing, right hand, choice of picks, and much more. Tim also discusses Tony's prize possession, the 1935 Martin D-28 Herringbone guitar formerly owned by the great Clarence White.

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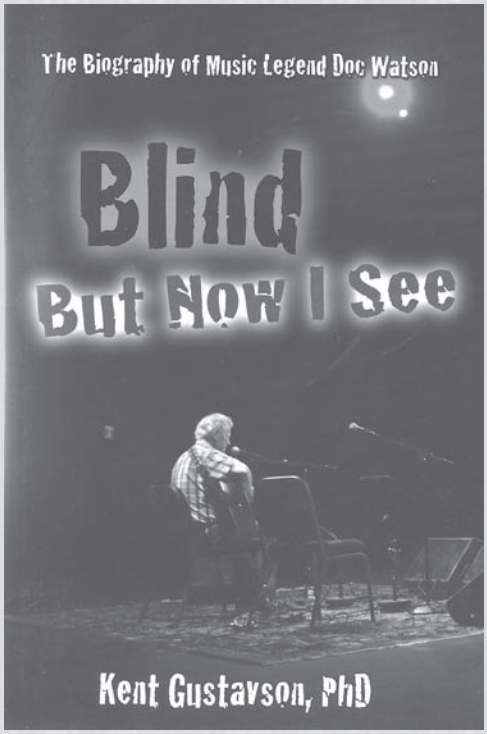

Blind But Now I See:
The Biography of Music Legend Doc Watson
by Kent Gustavson

From the day he stepped off the bus in New York City, North Carolina music legend Doc Watson changed the music world forever. His influence has been recognized by presidents and by the heroes of modern music, from country stars to rock and roll idols. This is a biography of a flatpicking legend.

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Both Books are Available at www.flatpickingmercantile.com

Reviews

Tyler Grant's
Flatpicking Up The Neck
Grant Central Records GCR1001

Reviewed by David McCarty

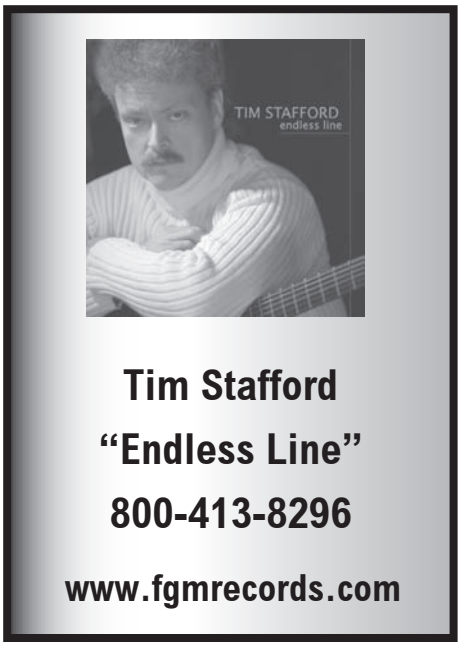
Tyler Grant, a frequent FGM contributor and winner of the National Flatpicking Championships at Winfield, Kansas, is clearly one of the rising stars of the flatpicking world. A regular with several popular bands on both bass and guitar, he's developed a keen sense of musicality and inventiveness as a musician both in a solo guitar setting and in a larger ensemble.

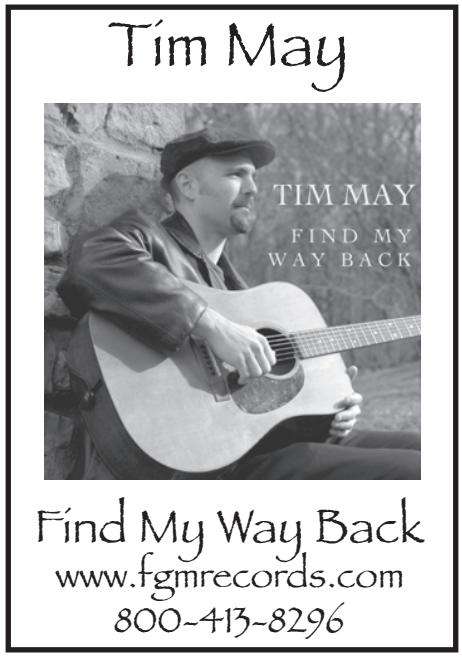
His latest release, *Up The Neck*, is intended to showcase his guitar skills, and it does that exceptionally well. Instrumental bluegrass albums have a long history, and flatpicking guitar, which entered the bluegrass world long after banjo, fiddle and mandolin emerged as lead instruments, has followed a similar path. Top-flight musicians ranging from Norman Blake, Clarence White, Dan Crary, Tony Rice, Bryan Sutton, David Grier, Cody Kilby, Steve Kaufman and many more have produced outstanding albums of instrumental bluegrass. Grant joins that list here, producing everything from brilliantly orchestrated guitar contest pieces to memorable original instrumental tunes and some great instruction materials on his latest release.

Grant says he wanted to produce an album focused solely on his guitar playing. That's a big task for any guitarist, but Grant mostly backs up his objective over 14 instrumental tunes, several of which are his compositions. For Winfield acolytes longing for intricate, highly arranged contest tune style guitar pieces, Grant obliges with gorgeous renditions of three of his contest numbers, "Forked Deer," "Beaumont Rag" and "I Don't Love Nobody." He stretches his musical boundaries on strong originals like "Springtime Flatpicking," "Hippie Guitar" and "Cache La Poudre." And he is joined by fellow Colorado flatpicker Bill Nershi (who also engineered the project) for a sweet guitar duet on "President Garfield's Hornpipe." For bluegrass lovers, Infamous Stringdusters banjo ace Chris Pandolfi also sits in on a tune named in his honor.

Up The Neck gives the listener a great dose of inventive flatpicking guitar music ranging from traditional tunes to the progressive alt-grass genre. Grant is obviously a highly skilled and talented player who has created a thoroughly enjoyable and highly entertaining CD that appeals to both hardcore acoustic guitar fans, but the many bluegrass lovers who enjoy the instrumental side of our music. After many enjoyable listenings, *Up The Neck* gets a definite thumbs up!

Tyler Grant's Up The Neck is now available at Flatpicking Mercantile (www.flatpickingmercantile.com).





Thief
Keller & the Keels
SCI Fidelity Records 1139

Reviewed by Eric Carlson

Covering modern rock songs in a bluegrass style might seem gimmicky at first glance, but it pans out brilliantly on Keller and the Keels' latest release, *Thief*. The album is composed entirely of covers, many far-removed from standard bluegrass fodder yet still familiar to most pickers who came of age in the last twenty years. Rather than brazenly challenging musical categories, it's as though they simply ignore them.

The trio is led by acoustic-guitarist and singer Keller Williams, an icon in the jamband scene known for epic solo performances in which he uses sophisticated looping technology to create the layered sound of a full-band by himself. This project, however, is simply acoustic, organic bluegrass, recorded live in the studio with only harmonies overdubbed. Joining Williams are fellow flatpicking guitar wizard Larry Keel (featured in FGM 8:4, 2004) and his talented wife Jenny Keel on upright bass.

While some songs on *Thief* are germane to bluegrass like Yonder Mountain Stringband's "Wind's on Fire" and Danny Barnes' "Get It While You Can" (popularized by The Stringdusters), other selections are much farther afield, such as a brilliant rendition of Amy Winehouse's recent pop-hit "Rehab" or "Bath of Fire" by The Presidents of the United States. A personal favorite is Cracker's "Teen Angst", an alt-rock anthem from my high-school days in the early '90s. "I'm a kid of the radio," says Williams. "So that's kind of where *Thief* comes from, incorporating my love of bluegrass music with more mainstream songs."

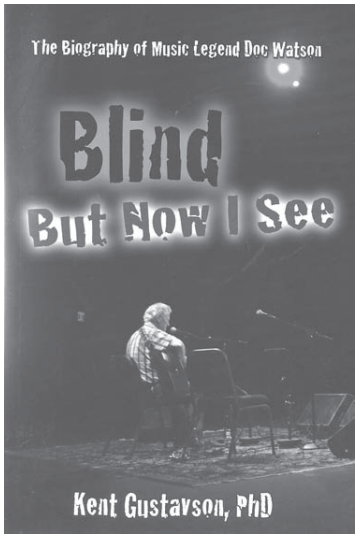
With the Keels, Williams plays a custom miniature 12-string guitar made by Joe Veillette of Woodstock, NY. Williams removes the four highest strings (the high E and B), leaving eight strings (or four double-course sets). "I'm trying to make that thing sound like a mandolin," he says. Indeed, he succeeds in creating that percussive mandolin-style chop, propelling the rhythm with nuance and enthusiasm.

Larry Keel nearly steals the show with his lead work. He plays a Santa Cruz Orchestral Model guitar, and his contribution is tremendous, both to the group and to the entire art of flatpicking. Williams gives him plenty of room for extended improvisations, his glimmering washes of notes filled with soulful inventiveness. Reflecting on playing with the Keels, Williams says, "It's been a blast. They definitely bring a sense of authenticity to this project."

Authentic it is, especially to 30-something-year-old pickers like me. By reinventing a broad swath of radio hits from the past twenty years, Keller and the Keels affirm the experience of a generation who grew up on songs like these and gravitated toward bluegrass later in life.

Book Review

Blind But Now I See
by Kent Gustavson
Blooming Twig Books, 2010



By Chris Thiessen

Biographies traditionally appear after their subjects have died, which provides both an emotional "distance" and an historical perspective. Chronicling the life of someone still living has inherent risks—lack of an historical perspective and risk of emotional involvement—but given the advantages of using the actual words of both the subject and contemporaries, they are justifiable risks.

In *Blind But Now I See*, Kent Gustavson does a superb job of providing a window into the life Doc Watson, a man most flatpickers know by sight and sound, but relatively few have met. Since Doc now rarely gives interviews, Gustavson has done a tremendous amount of academic legwork, finding interviews Doc has given in the past, researching Doc-related articles from other writers, and conducting hundreds of interviews himself (by email, phone, and in person) with Watson's musical contemporaries.

What emerges from this potentially dry academic endeavor (co-incident with Doc's 50th anniversary appearance as an active artist) is a very readable history of one of the primary figures of the art form. Gustavson blends disparate content into a narrative that reveals but respects the artist. We are not privy to deep psychological inquests, but neither do we see unwarranted praise. Gustavson walks a respectful line, difficult to do in our "tell-all" culture.

Nowhere is that balance of respect so evident as when Gustavson writes about the interaction between father and son. In "Doc and Merle" we see a young man developing first as an accompanist, then as an artist in his own right, who expands the family business and introduces his father to young talent and new influences. In "Midnight Rider" we have intimations of Merle's struggle with the psychological cost of being on the road.

Of particular interest to me was the interaction between Ralph Rinzler and Doc Watson. Rinzler was a folklorist and accomplished revivalist musician (as mandolinist with the Greenbriar Boys from 1959 until 1963), who dedicated himself to restoring awareness of authentic traditional music. In search of Clarence Ashley, he also found Watson, and was instrumental in convincing Doc that he had a profound musical gift. His dedication to this task, as Doc's manager and friend, brought Doc Watson out of anonymity in idyllic Deep Gap, North Carolina to tour the world and become a legendary artist. While Rinzler's agenda (to promote Doc as an "authentic" folk artist) did not always coincide with Doc's growth as an artist, Rinzler was instrumental in bringing the remarkable talent of Watson to the world.

In the 1985 documentary Doc and Merle (cited on page 101), Doc and Ralph are

talking about the early days and Doc remarks "I wouldn't go through that again…": in hindsight, Doc would have preferred to have remained unknown in Deep Gap. Ken Gustavson has done an admirable job in reminding us that Doc is, after all, just a guy who plays guitar really well, and that our fervor to experience his artistry and bring him into our lives ultimately has a cost. Bringing us to that understanding is the role of the biographer.

I recommend you immediately include *Blind But Now I See* in your personal bluegrass library.

Product Review

ToneRite
Does the ToneRite Make Your Tone Right?

Reviewed by David McCarty

In my experience, guitars and other stringed instruments improve with age due to a number of factors. In no particular order, I'd list the most important as the general quality, design, finish and materials of the original instrument; its exposure to climatic changes in temperature and humidity; exposure to UV light; how much the instrument was played; how hard it was played and what type of music was played on it; and the selective and highly subjective quality we have as players, owners and collectors to believe that the tones a vintage guitar creates are in fact (in some cases) better than a new guitar's tones, not just different. James Taylor was highlighted on YouTube not too long ago browsing through his guitar collection, commenting that his older guitars sounded "played out" to him. Obviously, to each his own, and I'm sure the luthiers and repair experts out there like Bryan Kimsey, Lynn Dudenbostel and Mario Proulx have their own assessments, as well.

But there's no denying there's a market for a device or process that "speeds up" the aging or break-in process for new instruments. Some classical musicians put their violins in sound chambers and bombard them with high-intensity sound before concerts. Some manufacturers chemically age the woods they use prior to construction. I've been guilty of bungee-cording new guitars and mandolins to my stereo speakers and blasting loud music into them for days at a time to accelerate the break-in process. We're a desperate group, aren't we?

Now along comes the ToneRite (www.tonerite.com), a small electric appliance that attaches directly to the strings of your guitar or mandolin right above the bridge via rubberized feet and imparts a carefully measured dose of harmonic vibrations into the instrument that is engineered to mimic the actual vibration of the instrument as it's being played. Now on its third generation, the devices have gained widespread popularity, triggering a variety of evaluations on guitar forums like UMGF and others. Chris Stanley, Alan Bibey, Eric Schoenberg and other notables in the music world are quoted as endorsing the device. It's even been written up in the New York Times. How can any self-respecting guitar geek refuse?

I received two of the newest generation ToneRite 3G models, one for mandolin and one for guitar, and have been testing them all summer in a variety of settings. On mandolin, I've tested them on a relatively new Eastman 605, an older Collings MF5 that had been virtually unplayed before its current owner acquired it, and a stunning 1989 Nugget Two Point that's simply one of the best-sounding mandolins on the planet. I followed the directions and applied the ToneRite for an uninterupted week initially, then listened for any difference. Not surprisingly, there was perhaps a small increase in bass response and overall volume in the Eastman, and no noticeable change to the Nugget. The Collings' owner, who is as skeptical of musical gimmicks as I am, said he was shocked to admit that the device produced an unmistakable improvement in overall tone and volume. I'm now into a full month of testing on the Eastman.

On guitar, I limited my testing to my personal Eastman AC320B, an Adirondack-topped, forward X, scalloped braced D18 copy, and my 2002 Dell'Arte Manouche Selmer-style gypsy jazz guitar with laminated EIR back and sides and a solid German spruce top. The Eastman, a very well-designed and built guitar that is only

New CDs at Flatpicking Mercantile

Maro Kawabata:
Sunset Drive

This CD from Maro Kawabata features the guitar playing of both Maro and Wyatt Rice. Wyatt also engineered and co-produced the project and Maro brought in a great line up of bluegrass pickers and singers to help him out, including Rickie Simpkins, Sammy Shelor, Adam Steffey, Ronnie Rice, Don Rigsby, Andy Hall, Patty Mitchell, and Richard Bennett.

Bryan McDowell:
The Contestant

Bryan McDowell is perhaps the most successful all-around contest player of all-time. During the past two years he has won an unprecedented number of contests on a variety of instruments. Anyone who has not heard Bryan play and is curious about this young talent, should check out Bryan's new CD.

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a year old, responded very positively to the test. I first used it for a week and heard some improvement, but nothing earth-shattering. Then I left it on non-stop for a month, came back to it, changed back to the same strings, and tried it out. The guitar, which earlier had had a pronounced peak to the highs and mid-range, was much warmer and richer in the bottom end. The whole guitar sounded better balanced and louder from string to string and up and down the neck. Does it sound like a vintage D18? Nope, more of a Collings D1A tone, but that's a function of the bracing and design. The Dell'Arte didn't experience as much change, but again it's a guitar that's been played-in heavily for 8 years through a couple hundred gigs and loud rehearsals.

Obviously, this is all subjective and it's scientific proof that the human ear is lousy at detecting changes in musical sound after more than a few seconds. I didn't have access to high-end studio gear where I could have recorded an A/B comparison in a controlled environment, so my assessment shouldn't be taken as gospel. But a few answers did appear.

First, the ToneRite seems to work best on high-quality instruments, which makes sense. A lightly built and finished guitar or mandolin, like the Collings MF5, is going to take less time to break-in than a heavier built, thicker-finished instrument like my Eastman mandolin. The ToneRite won't turn a tank of an instrument into a Loar F5 or '37 D18 no matter how long you leave it on. On the older, well-played instruments, little change was apparent. Again no surprise there, although I suspect that if you had an older instrument that hadn't been played for years the ToneRite would be valuable in "waking up" an under-Grandpa's-bed vintage find.

My other overall impression is that the ToneRite imparts macro-scale changes to the tone; louder, deeper, punchier. The finer points of complex harmonic shimmer, sonic bloom in the bottom end, responsiveness to touch and attack, I believe come more from the subtler changes caused by an instrument—any high-quality wooden stringed instrument—going through many years of shrinking and swelling as the seasons change, having the finish cured and affected by UV exposure, being playing long and hard, and other factors. Although it creates vibrations, music is far more than just imparting mechanical vibrations into the instrument's structure. The process of becoming a vintage instrument is more complex than mere vibrational energy.

So does the ToneRite make your tone right? For a new high-end guitar, I believe it definitely adds volume and response, especially on the bottom end where guitars with stiff Adirondack tops tend to take longest to mature. Leaving it on whenever you're not playing the instrument doesn't seem to have the potential to damage it—the vibration even at the highest setting is minimal and shouldn't shake loose a brace or affect the instrument structurally unless there's a defect of some sort. So for those inclined, I'd say ToneRite is a good tool.

But I also feel there's a definite curve of diminishing returns here, where after a couple of months you will have gotten all the benefit the device is capable of producing. Your only recourse then for further improvement in your instrument will be to play the guitar night and day under the broiling heat of Winfield and the chill night air of Merlefest, making music with friends onstage and in living rooms and around smoky campfires, writing love songs and practicing contest tunes and practicing hot licks until they're just right. Darn the luck!

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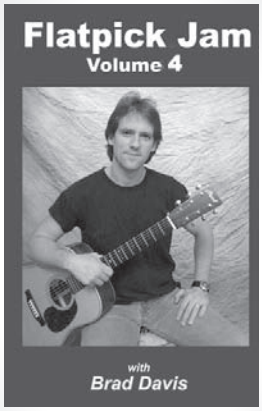

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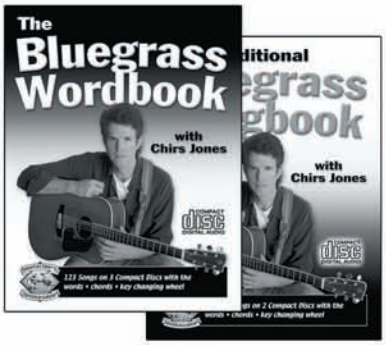

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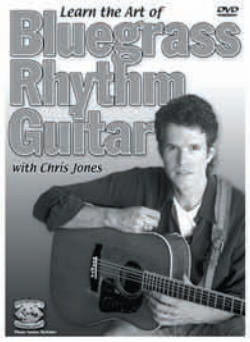

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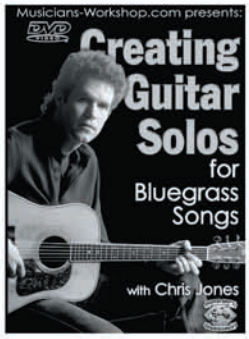

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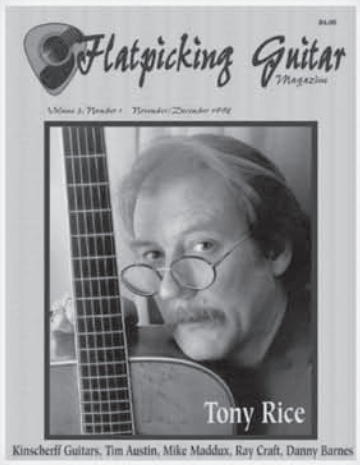

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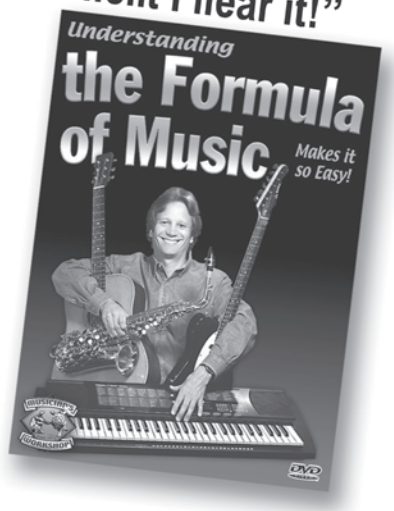

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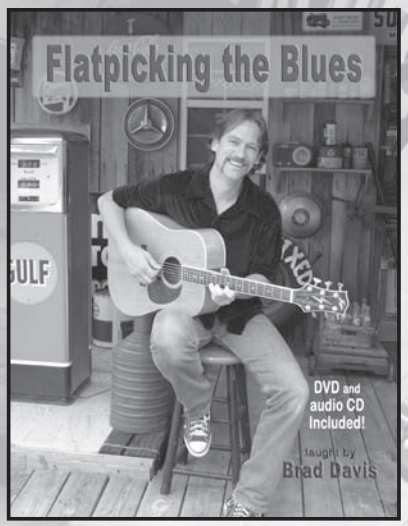

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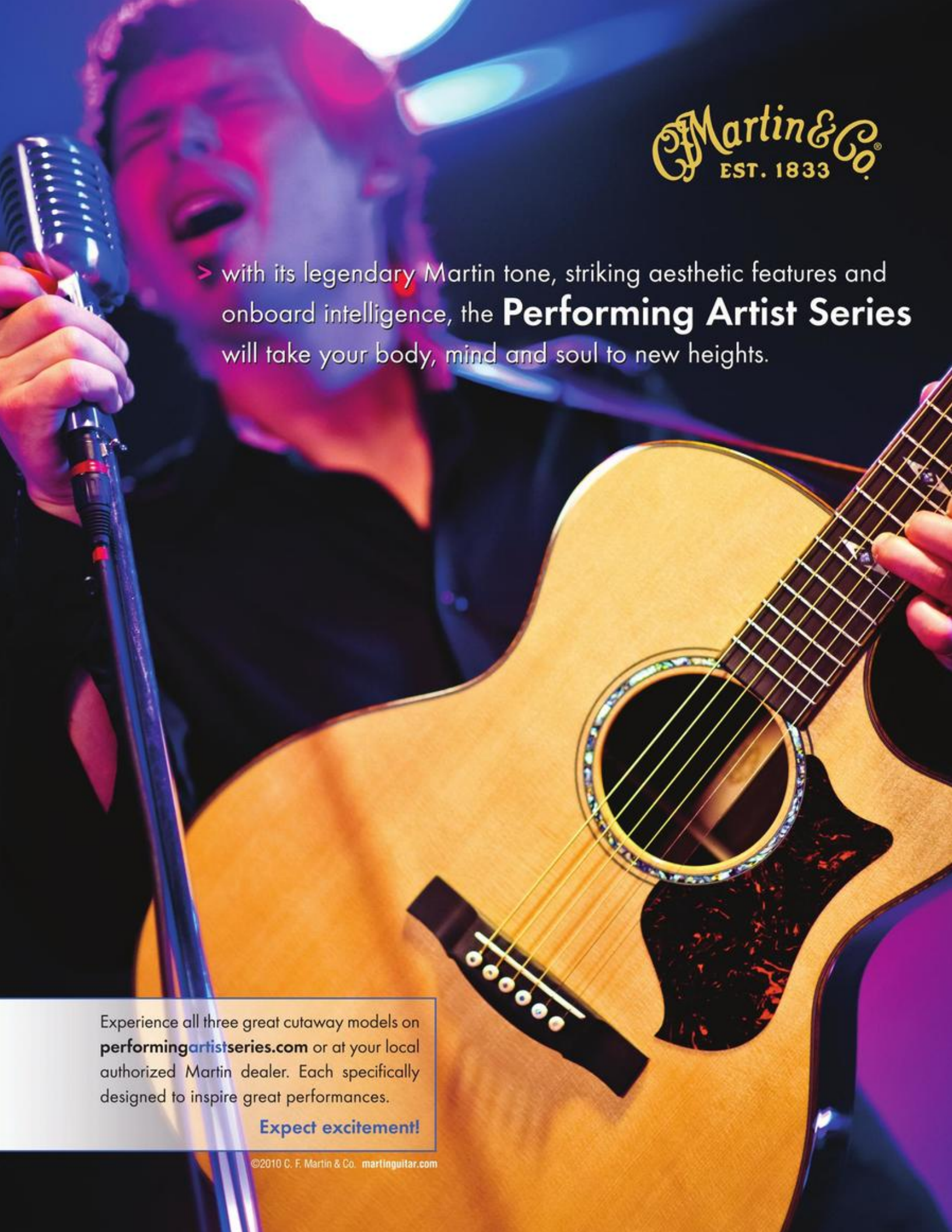
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